

**THUS SAYS KABIR,
“LISTEN, O’ BRETHREN SADHO!”**



EDITOR: GOVIND B. BHAKTA

Thus Says Kabir,
“Listen, O’ Brethren *Sadho!*”

Govind B. Bhakta



Bhakta Cultural Center
Norwalk, California

Dr. Chaitanya Desai has dedicated himself to fulfilling our dream. Much gratitude to Dr. Desai for his service to our society. Thanks from the bottom of our hearts.

—Editor

Thus Says Kabir: "Listen, O' Brethren Sadho!"

Editor: Govind B. Bhakta

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Thus Says Kabir, “Listen, O’ Brethren *Sadho*!”

Sadho: Sometime Kabir Saheb used the words like ‘Avadhu’, ‘Jogi’ “Brothers”, “Keshva” in place of *Sadho*! Kabir Saheb was aware of his listeners that they were Innocent souls; they were in process of divinity. They were the people not attached to worldly things. Kabir Sahib talked to them by giving them introduction of Soul (Jive), World (Jagat), illusion (Maya), and the Supreme Being (Brahma). They were: Truth seekers or Holy persons, who have renounced the world to live a life devoted to God or Ultimate truth.

So he had distinguished *sadho* differently from worldly sadhus or mahants or orange cloth saints that had not attained the qualifications Kabir Saheb had sought.

Kabir says:

*Who has found both love and renunciation; never descends to death.
True home is the abiding place; in the home is reality;
The home helps to attain him who is real. So stay where you are,
and all things shall come to you in time.
(Home meant Human body)*

The *Sadho* are listeners of secret mysterious talk of Kabir Saheb. Hence Kabir Saheb feels, *Sadho* are spiritually related with him. It is Kabir Saheb’s commitment - guarantees that they will be lifted spiritually upward as long as they search inner self with him spiritually and truthfully.

—Editor

Pani Kera Putala, Rakha Pavan Sanchar;
Nana Bani Bolata, Joti Dhari Kirtar

(Kabir)

*Lord who are we? We are but bubbles of water kept afloat
by the air you give;*

*We are speakers of various tongues living through the life
you breathe into us.*



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Kabir kuva ek hai, panihari anek
Bartan sab nyare bhaye, pani sabmai ek

Different people worship their almighty in their own way. They believe in so many religions, sects and panths. They use different means to achieve same goal — ultimately to perceive param braham even though the names of their almighty may be different. Nirguna and saguna are the forms of Brahma. One seems impersonal other seems personal. The same song is played in different tunes.





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Shree Ramkabit Bhakta devotees from all over the U.S.A. at Cultural Center, Norwalk, CA.

Courtesy of: Naresh D. Bhakta



Shree Ramkabit Bhakta devotees from all over the U.S.A. at Cultural Center, Norwalk, C.A.

Courtesy of: Naresh D. Bhakta



To all our young and elder Bhaktajan:

All the selfless work you have done and the services you have rendered will remain in our memory for ever. Your hard work and natural and innocent life style will be remembered for ever by the future generation. The sacrifices you made to grow our samaj like a banyan tree is a priceless gift to society. We would like to offer you gratitude from the bottom of our hearts in helping to create our society's backbone.



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This picture is from Kabir Ashram in Benaras. The structure was built much later. The pictures of Padukah and Mala are Kabir Sahab's personal belongings.

Courtesy Rajani Patel

Kabirvad situated at Shuklatirth Bank of River Narmada 10 miles from Broach (Bharuch) South Gujarat, India.



Thus Says Kabir, "Listen, O' Brethren Sadho!"

Dedication

This publication is dedicated with honor and reverence
To all our humble ancestors and the followers
Of Kabir-ideology, who have fondly adopted the
'Mantra' of Shri Ram Kabir in their lives and
Despite a lack of education and provincial upbringing,
Have shown us the way of the life and have
Given us 'Sanskara' culture.

Editor,
Publisher
Shri Ram Kabir Bhakta Samaj of USA

A Note of Gratitude

This publication, which is supported and cared for by many devoted hands and hearts, is sure to reach many hearts and souls. This publication of "Thus Says Kabir, "Listen, O' Brethren Sadho" is a collective effort.

I am thankful to the publisher, Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of USA; to Shri Bhaskerbhai, president and Shri Dinubhai, vice-president and the Trustees of S.R.B.S. and its Chapter's presidents, and their executive members who have extended their helping hand to this big venture.

I also want to thank Shri Karsanbhai, president; Shri Hasubhai, vice-president, the Trustees, secretary, and members of the executive committee of Shri RamKabir Mandir Trust, Surat for their generous support.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to our scholarly writers from India and abroad who have contributed to this book through their valuable articles and their love for Kabir. These scholars have tried their best to study and propagate Kabir literature. I am indebted to the family of Kabirvani and 'Bhakta-vani' of India and the USA for rendering their services to this publication.

Dr. Chaitanya Desai has been kind enough to translate most of the articles of this book and Mr. Manohar Patel of McAllen, Texas has also helped me translate some of the articles of this book from Gujarati into English. Thanks to both gentlemen.

Thanks to Shailesh R. Bhakta for proofreading some of the articles. I am thankful to my old friends Shri Vallabbhai C. Bhakta and Shri Anandrao Lingayat for their valuable guidance. I am grateful to Mr. Naresh D., Shree Bhikhubhai D., Pankaj R. and Dr. Rohit B. Bhaktas for their help. How can I forget my family members who have looked after all my conveniences and shared my responsibilities? They are my wife Sumati and children, Shailesh; Jayshree; Amit; Tina; Anand; Jai and Shiv.

Last, but not the least, I am grateful to all those whose names I could not mention, and yet, wish me well.

Thanks.....

—Editor

Kabirvad

(A famous Religious Holy Place of Shree Ramkabir Bhaktajans and all Kabir Followers)

—Editor

The Significance of the Holy Mother Narmada

Every race or religion or historical place or pilgrimage place has a unique history of its own. Kabirvad is one of them. One obvious question is why is Kabirvad in the Narmada River?

Bhartiya culture is a culture of river. There are some rivers that we consider as mothers. Therefore we name our daughters Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada etc. We find several pilgrimage places on the holy rivers. Among these rivers, Narmada is the only one where pilgrims congregate on its banks.

She is a river of bundle of beauties. Ganges is beautiful but up to Hardwar and then she flows to ocean on flat ground like a canal. But Narmada flows from mountains forests, caves, and rifts, creating waterfalls. In a comparison of beautiful rivers, she is most eligible river for the highest award. The villages on the banks of this river have produced writers like K.M. Munshi, R.V.Desai, Sundaram, Omkarnath Thakur, and B.K.Thakar. Markendey, Bhragu, Kapil, and Jamdagni's rushis ashrams (Hermitages) were situated on her banks' forests¹.

*"Saundarya ni adbhut mahavahini suprasanna,
utpatithi vilay lagi tun narmada- nam dhanya"*

o' pleasant flow carrying miraculous beauties from origin to dissolution,
Narmada is your name fortunate!

Hindus consider the Narmada as a Holy River. The river has beautiful Ghats built on its banks. People from all over India and from world come to pilgrim and to bath in the river.

Sankaracharya left his house at the age of eight and came to the bank of Narmada in search of Guru. He found one at the Aumkareshwar on the bank of Narmada in Madhya Pradesh. In "Narmanda Hymn of Praise," he wrote,

"when I saw your water, I became fearless—my qualms gone."³

Many mythological stories relating to Lord Shiva and his daughter Narmada have been woven around this mystical town of Amarkantak.

Narmada originates from Amarkantak (Madhya Pradesh) and ends at Khambhat Bay (Arabian Sea) near Bharuch in Gujarat. Bharuch was named after Bhargurushi, who is considered to be one of the greatest ascetic saints of India. In Amarkantak, one of the pilgrim place is known as Kabir-Chabutra, and in this place, Kabir Saheb spent time in meditation.



Kabir-Chabutra

Image courtesy: <http://anuppur.nic.in/Tourist.htm>

On the way to the estuary, the Narmada passes by the village Mangleshwar near Shukaltirth, which is named for its Mangal (Mars) temple. Shukaltirth is situated ten miles east of Bharuch. Several sandbanks form islands, or bets, near the estuary.

Kabir Saheb and Kabirvad

Kabirvad situated on the island at this Mangaleshwar town. One has to cross the river by small boat to visit Kabirvad. Kabir Saheb must have loved this river, since he spent time in meditation at the Narmada's origin. Towards the end of the river, Kabir Saheb left his footprints.

Tatva and Jeeva were both holy men who had dedicated themselves to God. They wanted to be one with God, and thus needed to find a guru who was a true saint. They could not find such a person, so they took a special vow. Tatva and Jeeva promised that if the water they used to wash a saint's feet would bring a dead banyan branch to life, they would accept that true saint as their guru.

For many years, the two brothers devotedly looked after, and humbly washed the feet of many sadhus⁴ and saints who passed their way. But each time they poured the water they used to wash the saints' feet, nothing happened. The dead branch simply did not grow. Tatva and Jeeva's disappointments grew, but though their hopes declined, their devotion did not wane⁵.

The years passed, and many saints continued to visit Tatva and Jeeva. These saints worried that society would shun them if Tatva and Jeeva failed to find a person who could make the dead banyan branch grow. A group of saints from North India then found an ascetic and pious saint named Kabirdas in Kashi. Five saints from Shukaltirth-Mangleshwar then journeyed to Kashi,

where they experienced the charismatic presence of Kabir Saheb. All vices like lust, anger, ego, and greed vanished, and their hearts became holy and sacred with the "darshana" of Kabir Saheb. Sataguru Kabir Saheb welcomed those five saints and housed them in the ashram. The five saints then informed Lord Kabir Saheb of Tatva and Jeeva's vow. Inscriptions found at Kabirvad verify that Kabir Saheb had visited Shukaltirth in samvat 1465.

Sadguru Kabir went to an island on the Narmada River where he met Tatva and Jeeva two brothers. Tatva and Jeeva washed Kabir's feet, and, as usual, poured the water on to the planted dry branch. To their great relief and surprise, tiny leaves began to appear on the branch, and the branch began to grow!

The branch grew into a great tree, so large that the likes of it had never been seen before. The descendants of this tree are still growing, and today it is thought to be the world's largest banyan tree. The place where it grows is called Kabirvad, meaning Kabir's Banyan Tree. And Shukaltirth was so named after Sadguru Kabir's visit there. "Sukhal" means all or combined; and "tirth" is a holy place which pilgrims visit to receive blessing or to become pure and free of sin. Shukaltirth means the place where you can receive more purity or blessings than all other holy places combined! Sadguru Kabir's presence is thought to guarantee that pilgrims will be showered with the fruits of righteousness.⁶

Moreover, Saint Nabhadass composed "Bhaktamal" in samvat 1642. "Bhaktamal" described the story of how Kabir Saheb fulfilled Tatva and Jeeva's search for a true saint guru.

Manekdas was a disciple of Pyaredas, who was in turn a disciple of Lochandas, a follower Padmanabha. Manekdas moved from Ashvanikumar Surat to Kabirvad samvat 1745 had wrote "Santvani." In this book, Manekdas had discussed this Tatva-Jeeva event at length.⁷

One of the sakhi from his Santvani book is:

*"Suke vat nile huee ghata chhai ghangore,
Mul Gaye patal Mei, shakha fale charo aura II
Sohi sukhe kath, Kabirvad kahlayai*

*Tatva-Jeevake tek KO Saheb Kabir Nihau,
Kabirvat ki chhanya me 'manekdas' lubhye II*

Baba Din Darvesh had written in "Bhakta Birdavli":

*"Sant Kabir dayanidhi, Reva (Narmada) ke tir aaye I
Sukhe kath jiyay, sadguruki balihari II*

The following sakhi from Guru Granth Sahib (savant 1661) also gives enough evidence that Kabir Saheb visited Kabirvad.

*"Garib tatva-Jeeva KO mile daxin bich Dayal I
Sukha thunth hara huka, aaise nazar nihai II*

According to Dr. Kantikumar Bhatt's article "Kabir Parampara," seventeen generations have completed the present temple of Kabirvad. First disciple Nirdas was established by Kabir Saheb and then by Jnaniji Maharaj. The tradition includes:

Nirdas > Devdas > Raghunathdas > Dayaldas > Bhagavandas > Devadas > Jagannathdas > Kamaldas > Balakdas > Ramratandas > Gordhandas > Ramdas > Vishnudas > Tulshidas > Gopaldas > Gokaldas > Rajendradas.

Eighty-six years ago, Fulibai of Arak Sisodra donated Rs. 4000 for renovation of the place and the flow of donation still continues. At present, a large temple to Kabir Saheb is being constructed. Along with the temple, there is Bhakti chowk, Kabir ground, Kabir kutir etc. On the premises of Mahant shree, Lt. Gokuldasjis has donated 40 to 50 acres of land from his own property,⁸ while his brother Lt. Dayaramdas from Surat Kabir mandir worked very hard to promote this place to present status. Attorney Bhulabhai Bhakta has helped financially to construct new Kabir temple⁹.

Places worth visiting include: the "paduka" and Chok of Kabir Saheb; a large Banyan tree whose branches are spread out and whose original trunk is untraceable; the memento of Kabir Saheb preaching to Tatva and Jeeva; the lotus-shaped artistic temple of Lord Kabir, which give glimpses of the life and works of Kabir Saheb; the holy banks of the river Narmada and a spectacular view of the island; the lodging houses for the Devotees.

In November 2005, Kabir Saheb's 600th birthday, current chief minister Narendra Modi visited Kabirvad in Kabir kumbh mela. In the presence of hundreds of saints like Morari bapu and before a large congregation, Modi declared that the place of Kabirvad would be developed as a "tourist pilgrim-age" in Gujarat.

Kabirvad: The Sacred Banyan Tree at Shukla-tirth

"Gatam tadeiva me bhayam, Twadmsu vikshitam yada."

The flowing water touches the feet and body of the bather and the sun rays confer renewed energy to his heart. He chants Gayatri-mantra and finishes his bath. He comes out of the river-water and looks at a mammoth banyan tree on the bank that is the 'Kabir-vad.'

Kaka Saheb Kalelkar has compared the Kabir-vad with a legendary or mythical person. One can be under its shadow and can be in its affinity. The observer becomes spellbound with the awe-inspiring and mind-cooling banyan tree. He wishes to embrace it, and looks for its trunk, but it is not possible to find out its original trunk. It's a great natural wonder. Kabir-vad is like a fascinating epic of nature! It has been standing since centuries, completely mute, listening to everything, but not responding to anyone. The history of culture hangs on its branches. It has enjoyed and endured the stories of seasons, the floods of the Narmada, it has protected and sheltered saints and monks and protected religion.

The young Kabirvad might have heard the natural vani-language of Kabir Saheb. Kabirvad might have given inestimable knowledge to Kabir Saheb who says:

"Behad ke maidan mei, Raha Kabira soy."

Kabir Saheb felt so much joy and bliss in this place. He was unable to describe it. He just wanted to enjoy the moment of bliss and to relax at the place.

The Kabirvad enchants me. I want to lend my ears to the voice of the infinite. The tale of time swings on the twigs of the tree. Kabirvad invites me to listen, only to listen. Whoever listens would attain something.

I feel my limits, my triviality, my smallness, helplessness in the presence of this tree. The 'I' within me is ashamed of my commonness. I become very light, devoid of weight of my ego. Like the hanging roots of the banyan tree.

The Saheb of Kabir is very much present. His invisible touch invites me to be vocal. But I enjoy silence. I embark upon a boat, being planted within my self and feeling the significance of 'Shabda' and 'Saheb'.¹⁰

Poet Narmad found him like a green mountain amidst holy waters.

*Bhuro bhasyo zankho, durthi dhumase pahad sarakho,
Nadi vachche ubho, nirbhaypane ek sarkho,
Disyo baryo joddho, haritanu hrude dhyan dharato,
Saware ekante, Kabirvad ei shok harto,
Kade dekhaye ei acharati janaye jagatma,
Khare ei mhorano, magrub rahe desh nav kan?
Manaye satsange pavitar Kabira bhagatma,
Prajani uruddhie, neet amar kahevay nav kan?
Jata pase jou, vad nahi, vadonu van khare,
Male aada-ubha, acti nikat niche uper je,*

*Vado zaza toye, sabu bhadi gaye ek disto,
Vadi sandhaonu asal jivatu ek mul to.*

*Thari mari aankho, kabir-vad tune nirkhine,
Khari papi buddhi, Khari ja rudi jatra thai mane,*

*Vishesh shobhe chhe, gambhir vad tuthi Narmada,
Krutarthi moto hun, darshan vade chhu Narmada.*

The late poet Narmad says at the end:

O' Kabirvad, how can I express myself, you are so wonderful! My eyes are saturated to see your magnificence. My sinful intellect has fall down. I really had done graceful pilgrimage. Narmada is beautiful and she appeared more beautiful because of you, tolerant vad. I am so grateful to observe you, Narmada.

Endnotes:

¹ Amratlal Vegad: Saundaryani Nadi Narmada

² Jayant Pathak.

³ Vinoba Bhawe: "Nadiothi posayeli aapani sanskruti, Bhumiputra," Akhandanand, September 28, 2006.

⁴ The word "Sadhu" means a saintly person, one who has given up all material pursuits in life to devote himself to worship and God.

⁵ Dr. Niranjan D. Patel, from his article "Life Sketch of Sadguru Kabir."

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Dr. Kantikumar Bhatt: "Ramkabir Sampradaya-Uda-panth."

⁸ From Kabirvani July 2000.

⁹ Temple means Gadi, where kabirvani is preserved in holy Granth, like Bijak. Physically, the structure looks like a regular temple constructed in a dome shape.

¹⁰ Praful Raval; "Kabirvad- Lalit Nibandhn," Akhandand, November, 2004, 118, 119.



Appearance of Sadguru Kabir



Adoption by Neeru and Neema



Naming ceremony



Initiations by Swami Ramanand

*Courtesy: Shree Ramswarupdasji, "Glimpse of the life of Sadguru Kabir",
Kabir Asram - Kabir Road, Jamnagar Gujarat, India. 1990*

II RAM II

KABIR SAHEB IS THE LIGHT HOUSE OF UNDIVIDED INDIA AND OF SPIRITUAL UNITY. KABIR SAHEB'S VISION AND HIS INNOCENT, NATURAL PERSONALITY, IS ALWAYS IMMORTAL IN THE SOCIETY AND HE IS ALIVE ALL THE TIME. IN MY VIEW KABIR SAHEB IS A REVOLUTIONARY LEGENDARY PERSON. THE LETTERS ON RUBBER STAMPS ARE UPSIDE DOWN BUT WHEN YOU PRINT IT, WE SEE EVERYTHING PROPER. SIMILARLY, KABIR SAHEB'S VANI-LANGUAGE IS UPSIDE DOWN BUT WHEN WE PRINT IT IN OUR HEART IT TURNS OUT PROPER AND IT LIBERATES US FROM IGNORANCE AND WORLDLY DESIRE. HE GIVES AN EASY AND USEFUL PRESCRIPTION TO MODERN WORLD ON SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT IN THE FOLLOWING VERSE:

*'Kabir kahe Kamalko do bata shikh lay
Kar sahebki bandage bhukhe ko khuch day'*

KABIR SAYS LISTEN O' KAMAL, LEARN TWO FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES, PRAY ALMIGHTY AND GIVE SOME THING TO THE HUNGRY.

WHAT A GREAT TRUTH HE HAS SAID TO OUR WORLD! I BOW TO SUCH A PERFECT SAINT KABIR SAHEB.

With Ram Simaran,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Pujya Moraribapu', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Pujya Moraribapu

Divine Message

We are fortunate enough that our ancestors had tried to reflect on the preachings of Master Kabir and that these efforts are still continued. The Shri Ramkabir Bhakta community spreads the message of unity among different religions. As the water of the river is shared by everybody, the teachings of Kabir are for everyone irrespective of his caste or religion. Everyone is entitled to have this glass of elixir and get satisfaction, by quenching the thirst.

"Kabir ya Sansarmein panch ratan hei sar.

Sadhu milan aru Haribhajan, Daya deen upkar."

Our Guru has shown us these five gems which are clearly available in his sakhi, shabda and 'ramaini.' Marriage, death and celebration of festivals by Bhakta Samaj are accompanied by the bhajans of Shri Ram, Krishna, Kabir Saheb, Narsinha Mehta etc. This is very much adorable. We all know many sakhis of Kabir Saheb, and one of them is:

"Kabir kahe Kamal ko, Do batan shikh le;

Kar saheb ki bandgi, Bhukhe ko kuchh de."

The very theme of this couplet is memory of God along with kindness and renunciation. This is taught to us since childhood in our families.

Kabir Saheb says:

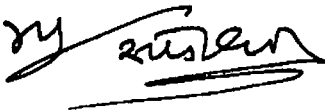
"Nahi abanta aa niye, Hari Sinhasana deya,

Jo dil rakhe dinata, to sai neej kar leya."

A true devotee never behaves to offend anybody or to insult anyone. We politely beg pardon for our disagreeable behaviors by saying 'Ram-Kabir.' Our Bhakta Samaj has still retained the virtues of sharing our joys and sorrows taught to us by our ancestors.

Our community is practicing social welfare and selfless service either individually or collectively, through many activities. Such efforts confer peace, satisfaction or joy, light heartedness to our community.

Shri Govindbhai has endeavored to convey the message of Kabir Saheb to our community and quench the thirst of the eager souls.



Poojya Ma Sarveshwariji

Foreword

Bhaskerbhai Dhirajbha Bhakta
President, Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj, U.S.A.

Kabirji's speeches and writings (his 'bhakti-literature') are not mere words, but a treasury of his own experiences! This is the reason why it touches our hearts and attracts ordinary souls like us to his wonderful personality. Kabir Saheb worshipped humanity and opposed all the narrow beliefs, rigid rituals, superstitions, deceptions and blind faith of various sects. His message of love and brotherhood continues to be relevant at a time of hatred, jealousy, contempt, and such vices. We can fulfill our life by adopting his message. He has said in Hindi:

*"Pothe padh padh jag mua, Pandit bhaya na koi,
Dhai akshar prem ka, Padhe so pandit hoi"*

Kabir Saheb was a revolutionary and visionary saint. His speech and thought contained the seeds of revolution in his era. A matter of great pride for us is the spread of Kabirji literature around the world. Writers and scholars attracted by Kabirji's writings include our very own Nobel recipient, the poet Ravindranath Tagore, who had translated some of his poems into English. The American scholar, Robert Bly has also translated some of Kabir-literature into English. Kabir's bhakti poems have also been translated into French.

Today, when society is faced with undesirable and complex changes, we need the spiritual insight and vision of Kabirji the most, to guide us in the right direction. We need to spread this literature to the young generation and to put it in practice. Shri Govindbhai B. Bhakta is doing such efforts, and hence deserves to be congratulated. His publications reflect Kabir Saheb in its proper social and cultural perspective. His dedication, devotion and diligence in publishing such works as "Thus Says Kabir, 'Listen, O' Brethren Sadho Truth Seeker!" and 'PATELS', a title based on the community survey not only benefits the Bhakta community in particular but everyone in general.. I pray to the Almighty to bless him with ever more energy, vigor and zeal for such social service activities.

I am confident and hopeful that this publication will carve its niche in the hearts of readers. It will be a lighthouse for the common people sailing in

the ocean of ignorance. Let us keep that couplet of Kabir Saheb in mind and try to make our lives more meaningful, elevated and illuminated. Ram Kabir to all!

*"Kabir, jab hum paida hue, Jag hanse hum roe,
Eaisi karni kar chalo, Hum hanse jag roe!"*

Kabir Aspects of Life

Editor: Govind B. Bhakta

The revolution of religious reform, which Kabir Saheb had launched 600 years ago, needs to be followed today on a global level. Scholars and researchers around the world continue to study and publish essays and papers on Kabir and his work. The work of compiling and publishing such articles was initiated by the trustees of Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of the USA and Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of India. The main reason is to make the best of Kabir's literature available to interested readers and to our community brethren.

A survey conducted by the American Broadcasting Corporation revealed that more than 90% of America's inhabitants believe, directly or indirectly, in 'God' or the 'power of God' or 'something' which they can't define or describe. They believe that 'something' is there, in which they have faith, and which helps living better. This percentage of believers in India would be higher, with many of them having faith in some Idol or Being that they call God or Goddess. In our articles and books, we try to figure out what the world is searching for, what that "something" is. We shall try to comprehend 'Kabirvani' — the words and language of Kabir with scholarly zeal.

Since Gizni's Emperor Shahbuddin Ghori's invasion in 1193 of India, up to the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, 38 foreign rulers ruled over Hindustan, India. Gizni and Khilji demolished temples and constructed mosques. Gizni had come to Hindustan for two purposes, per Taimur Lang's diary: (1) convert Hindus to Muslims; and (2) satisfy the Muslims by looting the wealth and property of Indi/Hindus.

Sikendar Lodi had spread terror in Hindustan, converted the Hindus into Muslims by force, and harassed the Hindus using his political, social and religious authority. Aurangzeb, who ruled over Delhi only 300 years ago, destroyed the Hindu culture, fine arts, and sculpture. He imposed many taxes on the Hindus, and did great damage by forcing the conversion of Hindus to Muslims.

During this period of turmoil, the end of the 14th century (1398 A.D.) Kabir Saheb is believed to have been born in the northern part of India in Kashi a holy city of Hindustan (India) and have ascended to heaven at the close of

15th century or the dawn of 16th century. He was said to be born to a deserted Brahmin widow and was brought up by a poor Muslim weaver couple Neema and Niroo. He was initiated by Guru Ramanand with 'Ram-nam'.

Kabir Saheb lived a unique and revolutionary life. All the 'avatars', who have descended on the holy land of India, have been worshipped for their certain mission and work they had done in India. As Lord Krishna is 'Purna Purushottam', Lord Ram is 'Maryada Purushottam'. Lord Mahavir and Buddha, Ram and Krishna were born to the royal families as prince and restored the reign of religion. Kabir Saheb, as contrary to them, was brought up by a poor Muslim weaver and followed the same occupation of a weaver for his lifetime as a very rustic simple man, but nobody was turned from his home hungry. Kabirji proved from his self-experience that the eternal or spiritual element is equally attainable by literate or illiterate, wealthy or poor, pundit brahmin or a poor cobbler.

"Kabir Saheb had mastered the art of preaching with affection and taunt. He propagated tolerance. He gave the word 'RAM', the same statues as lord, worshipped by 'King Dasharath'. Kabir's ideology teaches to be true and normal by abandoning all sorts of artificiality, for the sake of religion and truth. This is an inherent truth lies in everyone, which is manifested in love, devotion and meditation. 'Nam-simaran' (mental chanting of 'Mantra') can lead to pure devotion to eternal — 'Nirgun' (devoid of 'guna') 'Param-Jyoti' (the ultimate light) of Lord of Ram".

There were many poets in India, in the medieval era who composed verses of devotion Chaitanya, Meeraabhai, Narsinh Mehta, Namdev, Tukaram, Akho and many others, enlighten the unity of the humanity with the divinity. But among them, Kabir's is of different clan. He not only preached the unity of 'Jiva' and 'Shiva' but his was wide and unique personality looking from various angles. Different scholars and thinkers, saints and monks have tried to comprehend him in their own manner and have tried to present and interpret accordingly.

"It is difficult to define and to put Kabir in any single compartment, as he can not be traced or chased in the single direction. If we try to catch him at one end he escapes from other end. He does not accept anything blindly that is traditional. There were many contemporary creeds and cults, preachers, method of 'bhakti', prevalent in his time, but Kabir's ideology contained and continued to swim against the current. He dared to propagate it with his own conviction. As a poet Kabir believes in humanity and in his own self. Being open minded and simple hearted, his ideas has power to lead us to complete illusion-free neutral life. This quality confers his speech inherent truth and conviction. The religious complexities, so-called religious gurus and false rites and rituals are his constant butts of ridicule. 'Mulla' and 'Pundit' are his targets to express his reasonable and severe anger."

Kabirji is unique among the galaxy of saints and social reformers. He was not only a devotional poet, but a successful 'Saadhak' (practitioner of meditation) also. Many controversial legends have been woven around his birth, life, work, his parents, his caste, his bringing - up, marriage, wife Loi, children-Kamal-Kamli, Guru, benefactor, his miraculous events with Sikander, Kaji-Shekji, Hath-yogi Gorakh, his demise at Magahar tomb of flowers etc. But we should accept whatever we feel true and useful and let the rest be where it is!

Kabir's "bhajans and dohas" or devotional verses and couplets contains compassion and affection. The inner desire of communal harmony, rejection of bondages of caste and creed, the mystery of achieving the limitless and internal elements, by goes deep into the unmatched depth of mind etc. They have been addressed to the supreme soul, which dwells beyond the visible.

It requires a discussion in detail, whether Kabir Saheb opposed idol-worship or worshipping some religious symbols. However, history witnesses that Kabirji was in all respects neutral. But he has given the symbolic doses of 'Chemo-therapy' in the acidic tongue to awaken the people from slumber of blind faith, fanaticism, superficial rituals, deceptive rites and the evils resulted there of.

The Essence of Saint Kabir Philosophy:

Tatva and Jiva, the two brothers, lived at Shuklatirth, on the bank of the river Narmada. They had a vow to find a Guru, who would be able to enliven a dry branch of banyan tree planted in front of their house. Kabir Saheb visited that place in Samvat 1465 and fulfilled the vow of the two brothers, and blessed them with discipleship. The same banyan tree, spread in the acres of land, has become a pilgrim place and the centre of faith among the people.

Jnaniji, who was the able Vaishnav Acharya of South Gujarat at that time, was in search of 'Self realization' who came in saintly contact with Kabirji and had sessions of satsang. He made Gnaniji visualize the same 'Ram' in his body and everywhere, whom he used to worship as the son of king Dasharath. He made Kabir Saheb his Guru, and hence Kabirji showed him the middle path between the Vaishnava (believers of Visnu) and Kabir Panthis and gave him the 'mantra' of 'Ramkabir'. These followers, the Vaishnavs, came to be known as 'Shri Ramkabir Bhaktas'. They believe Kabir to be their Guru and worship Ram as their God. They recite the bhajans of Ram and Krishna's affectionate devotion. They believe and see Ram not only as the son of Dashrath, but an omnipresent godly element. They also celebrate Lord Krishna's birthday and sing 'hindola'; the swing on which 'Ram and Krishna' swings in their mind. This is a unique 'Bhakta-Samaj', who follows the middle path of Kabirpanthi's severity and Vaishnava's orthodoxies. They don't worship the idol of Ram and

Krishna; neither have they had rites and rituals, preventive practices. However, they sing the bhajans of Ram, Krishna, Kabir, and Meera which restricts preventive and external rituals. They also follow the affectionate devotion of the Vaishnavas. They recite traditional bhajans accompanied by musical instruments (kansa-dholak) on the occasion of marriage, death and seasonal festivals in rhythm. They have been composed in 23 ragas. The philosophy of 'Shri Ram Kabir Bhakta' Samaj is knitted in the 28 verses of Adhyaruji (Padmanabh's disciple, Dhanraj Adhwaryu). It is believed that these 28 verses that include the philosophy (Spiritual knowledge) of 4 Vedas, 18 Puranas and 6 Darshana. Dhanaraj has preached 'Nirguna' bhakti in those verses, however, they recite the 'leela' (divine deeds) of Ram and Krishna considering them the avatars of the Supreme Brahma. Kabir Saheb says for Him:

*'Sagun ki seva karo, Nirguna ka karu jnan,
Nirgun sagun ke pare, tabe hamara dhyan.'*

Thus, Kabir Saheb did not oppose 'Saguna' bhakti. His love for the Supreme Brahma is reflected in some of his Sakhi and verses as a beloved and the divine lover.

Come On, Can't We All Just Get Along? Global Harmony Of Religions: A Hard Nut To Crack

The era of the Vedas is believed to be A.D. 10,000 B.C. After this period, many saints or godly figures rose into the world. Examples include Confucius and Lao Tze in China, Zarthushta in Iran, Plato Socrates in Greece and so on.

In India, we had the rishis, during the Upanishada era and Lord Buddha and Mahavir in the later period. Jesus Christ is believed to be the incarnation as the 'son' of God. In the seventh century Hazarat Mohammad Payagambar incarnated as the prophet of Allah. The preachings of all the saints till Christ's birth, remained in the oral tradition. Such preachings passed through long phase of different interpretations till they got into printed and bound volumes³.

The followers of different religions in the world are as under:- the Christians-2.17 billion, the Muslims-1.34 billion, the Sanatan Hindus-0.87 billion, the Buddhists-0.38 billion, the Jains 4.6 million, the Shikhs 26.0 million and the Kabirpanthis 5.0million⁵. Other minor religious groups and atheists and non-religious groups have not been included here. This proves that the Hindus are divided into different sects. They have no founder. The Hindu religion is so modest and moderate that no single principle unite them together. Anybody on earth can become a Hindu or desert Hinduism and join other religion, who

may worship any God. The Hindu is the only religion which is most generous and secular which encompasses all religions.

The analysis of (major) religious population could be like this:- the Christians 45%, the Muslims 29% and the Sanatani Hindus 18% approximately.

Shri Manubhai Pancholi, a Famous Gandhian thinker, used to say : "Jode te Dharma, tode te Adharma". (Religion unites, and non-religion divides.) Gandhiji, presented the merits and demerits of Hinduism very affectionately. He said, though he was a Hindu, he disapproved untouchability. He was ashamed of calling him a Hindu, where untouchability existed. Kabir Saheb also had said such by calling himself neither Hindu, nor Muslim, if the Hindus are to consider 'Lord Ram' as their only God and the Muslims to Allah.

*"Hindu Kaho to mein nahin, Muslim bhi naahin,
Panch tatva ka putala, Gaivi khelai maahi."*

Here Kabirji talks about the communal unity and harmony between Hindus and Muslims by pointing at omnipresent form of Brahma and Allah.. Kabirji and Gandhiji makes the masses aware of true religion. It was the time when preaching against the narrow attitude of certain group or class of both the Hindu and Muslim communities, was a great risk, but yet Kabirji dared to say the truth, rather bitter truth for unity. He suffered great opposition for the same, but did not leave the neutral path of truth. Let's discuss the global agitation in the name of religion.

1. Jesus has considered himself the Son of God, by saying — "I have been accommodated within Supreme Soul and He is within me". He was preaching, there is only one God and consider him as your father (John 15: 5). Jesus was calling himself the king of kingdom of Lord¹. Majority of the Christians believe Jesus as the benefactor of mankind. They do not oppose other religions, they are soft with other belief, but religiously speaking, some Christian faith believers believe Jesus is the God most believe a Savior.

2. Mohammed Payagambar considered himself to be the messenger of Allah, so his speech is that of Allah's speech and hence it is ultimate and truthful. He is the only creator of the universe. He is the only benefactor. They don't believe in other than Allah. Hence most of the Muslims believe there is no other God except Allah. Those who are not Muslims and those who do not follow this true religion had inherited hell. (5:73; 112:14; 3:77) koran

3. The Hindus, according to, the Bhagvad Gita: — It seems this world is made of the perishable soul and the imperishable soul. But beyond these two ('kshar' and 'akshar') there is the form of Brahma, which is known as Supreme Soul, which enters into all the three worlds and creates, maintains and destroys all; yet he remains detached (chapter 15: 16,17) of Bhagvad Gita.

Brahma is universal hence there is only one God the names may be different. The Hindu religion confesses freedom to every individual. Each individual is free to think. Improve upon and may express his or her views on religion and oneself fit to practice and spread religion.

Islam is too staunch and authoritative to share it with others. Christianity teaches that no other super element than the 'Christ' would be the savior of the world. The Hinduism is very soft; who could adjust with other religion's dogmas conveniently.

All the three religions believe in one supreme element, which is limitless. Which is unidentifiable, and which is addressed by different names — Jesus calls it 'The Kingdom of God's. Islam calls it 'Allah' and the Hindus — 'Par Brahma'.

The question is, the same supreme element is in all human being and all religions should have the same supreme elements in the world is not acceptable by the two major religions. Therefore, these different compartments for different Gods should be integrated and make them intact. Kabir has broken this orthodoxy and propagated universal monotheism.

The couplets of Kabir Saheb contain the wisdom of the end truth of experience and make the reader or listener feel the plain truth by compelling him to abandon illusion, deception and orthodox thinking. Such couplets (Duha) Kabir Saheb plucks from real life routines in such a way that the listener gets its throb of contemporary social and religions life. e.g.,

*Chalati chakki dekhike, Diya kabira Roy
Do patan bhitari aai ke, Sabit bacha na koi.*

Kabir Saheb feels very sad when he observes people crushing themselves in the name of religions, conflict of vices and virtues. Religion and non-religion. Religious illiteracy, which loused religious, clashes among people. Kabir Saheb says between the stones of grinding mill no grain is spared except those stick to the middle axis of the grinder. There is only one God in the world for brown, white, black beard or skin headed people. Six hundred years ago and the same situation is prevalent today. We have not improved much.



George Grasnun, one of the scholars on Kabir, dreams that: - in the coming years there would be three traditions of Kabir. (1) Pir Kabir (for Muslim) (2) Vaishnav Kabir (for Hindu) (3) Staunch Kabir (for conservative firm). All the three traditions would create a unique brainstorm. Thus the intellectuals would consider Kabir as the angel who advocated universal monotheism. Kabir Sahib had visualized 600 years ago that:

*"Dekho sabme Ram hai, Ek hi ras bharpur,
Jaise ukhate sab bana, Chini, Sakkar, gur."*

As Sugar, jiggery and such sweetening agents are all made from sugarcane, they exhibit difference in color and form but their inherent quality is one. It is the same way we all people cherish 'Ram' or Allah or Christ any spiritual element which is universal. We should not quarrel over his different manifestations.

Endnotes:

¹ From the Prin. Yashwant Shukla's lecture, Bardoli Saminar, '89.

² Bhagawatikumar Sharma, Kabirvani Publication, Jan. '99.

³ Chandrakant Baxi: "Vintage Wine" Gujarat Times, USA.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, "Bible History Atlas", New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1982, p.71.

⁵ The World Almanac 2008.

Introduction

Shri Karsanbhai Lallubhai Bhakta
President, Shri Ramkabir Trust, Surat

Shri Ramkabir Mandir Trust publishes various types of literature on our spiritual Guru Kabir Saheb, which is widely accepted and most inspiring. Kabir Saheb has suggested the simple ways of art of living, dedication, devotion and salvation. There are many social publications; the authors have tried to reach common man through them. Our Ramkabir Mandir Trust, congratulates them all and expresses gratitude to them. Many years ago, Shri Ishvarbhai Patel, a scholar of Sanskrit, had also published four booklets on Kabirji, which were well received by our Bhakta-Community. The booklets proved very useful to all.

Shri Govindbhai Bhakta, an ex-professor, has made an unique endeavour by compiling this book. Here is a compilation of articles on Kabirji by celebrated writers and scholars and by Govindbhai himself as well. This is one of wave from the ocean of knowledge on Kabir and his philosophy is filled in this single booklet, which spreads Kabir's message to people.

Shri Govindbhai belongs to our circle of community. Originally he is from Sarai- Dhaman (Navsari) and presently settled in America. After having studied in India, he served for seven years as a lecturer in Maths and Statistics in Garda College, Navsari. Presently, he has retired from his real estate business, and enjoys the boons and blessings of a joint family along-with spiritual and social activities. He is happy with his wife Sumatiben (M.Sc), son, Sailesh (B.S., M.B.A., and Elet. Computer Egg.), Jayshri (daughter in law) B.S. Occupational Therapist , and, younger son, Amit D.S. dentist, Jay and Shiv, Grandsons.

A 'Kabir-Panthi' Govindbhai belonged to the Mahant family, who was reared up in its religious and virtuous atmosphere, who has gained higher education and engaged himself in business and his enthusiasm, experience and vigor to contribute something to society. And consequently has compiled this volume and presented it in the intellectual and religious services to society

Shri Govindbhai with numerous activities in America, such as-Bhakta Cultural Center, Norwalk, California, Shri Ramkabir Mandir, Carson, USA, Radhakrishna Mandir and many other socio-religious organizations. He has studied Kabir well. Here is an unique treasure of articles from scholars from

India and abroad. Our future generation would certainly get inspiration and knowledge from this book. Not only young but I feel, that even the senior citizens would also enjoy this reading. It would suggest us a true path of life.

I wholeheartedly wish and pray almighty to confer strength, and vigor to Govindbhai to perform such invaluable service to our community.

At the Juncture of this Publication

Prof. Dr. Ashvin Desai

Literature has served me as a means to perceive life and society for the last four decades of my career as a devoted teacher of languages. As a modest penman and a humble reader I have gone through literary appreciation and I could embark upon a considerable cognition and explanatory attitude of life.

As life and literature are inter-related, so are life and society. Social life could better be perceived and viewed by literary eyes with this understanding. I undergone the endeavour to awaken and enrich our socio-cultural consciousness among various social sects of Gujarati speaking people through education.

Here are some of the findings of my study: The first and foremost finding of mine is that Shri RamKabir Bhakta Samaj is well integrated community. Its texture contains fascinating fabrics of devotion toward the Guru, Shri Kabir Saheb. Such an integrated and devoted force confer a sustaining strength not only to an individual but also to society and people at large. The Kabir literature and devotion to Kabir Saheb has become a back bone support to the community members of Bhakta Samaj. It holds the Samaj together sprawling in twelve fifteen countries around the globe.

Water is the source and force of life in the world and in vegetation. The flow of blood keeps our body vitally active. In the same way, the spread of a sustaining ideology keeps the society or community groups active and throbbing. The 'Kabir-Vani' periodical has really proved a medium of our community consciousness since decades.

Prof. Govindbhai Bhakta, a leading researcher of Bhakta Samaj, has been presenting this volume in the hands of Bhakta Samaj, after a painstaking process. Its an edition of various articles on Kabir Saheb by Indian and foreign scholars. Earlier, he has compiled a publication on the NRI members of Bhakta-Patel Samaj. This volume has seen the daylight after great efforts of Govindbhai, his family members and friends. It reflects their clear vision and direction. He deserves congratulations on this occasion. I do so as one of his well wishers and friends. My association with Bhakta Samaj has been long standing and amicable.

The present volume contains the blessings of our elders and scholars. The celebrated as well as budding writers of Gujarati have happily contributed to

this endeavour. It has also included some brief review of books on Kabir Saheb by foreign authors. Hence, the usefulness of this volume has risen higher not only for the Bhakta Samaj members, but also for general readers at large.

We have been engulfed into materialistic ways of life these days. It has consumed us with mental tension and disintegration. The rapidly changing social scenario and family structures shock us. They compel us to enter into cut-throat competition and hectic life. On one hand, we have to cope with the changing world and on the other to remain in touch with our socio-cultural heritage. As Gujaratis, we are afraid of losing our identity in the rapidly transforming world. In such a contemporary context, the reading of such a volume on Kabir ideology would be a great source of solace and hope to sustain our faith and true path to life. Shri Govindbhai, the force behind this Endeavour, his family members, supporters and the office bearers of Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of USA and all elders deserve congratulations and reverence!

Words of Inspiration

Lalin G. Bhakta

Past President, Shri Ramkabir Temple Inc., Carson, CA

Kabirji had taken revolutionary steps against our contemporary problem like religious harmony and social unity 600 years ago. He had waged a war against pundits, priests or Mullas who were taking benefit of people's blind faith in the name of religion. He had almost spent his life to establish peace, harmony and brotherhood between the Hindus and Muslims by total destruction of hatred of religious fanaticism. He tried hard, through out his life, to explain the triviality and cruelty of caste discrimination. But it seems a big question whether people of India have understood his ideology even today? The readers should think that Kabirji was not an idol-praising God. He was a brave knight fighting against social evils at the cost of his life.

Many scholars and researchers from foreign universities have come in India and studied Kabir and his philosophy deeply. American professor Dr. Linda Hess and Mexican professor David Lorenzen have studied Kabir literature in great detail.

Shri Govindbhai Bhaktibhai Bhakta (of Sarai, presently at Buena Park, California, USA) is also a good reader of Kabir. Basically, being a professor he has compiled this volume and has added a unique edition. Earlier too, he had compiled and published a book on the Socio-economic progress of Patel Community, settled in America.

I heartily welcome this volume 'Thus Says Kabir! Listen O' Brethren Sadho!' and thank his sincere efforts. His dedication and devotion are praise worthy. We eagerly await the forthcoming literature from you.



Deliverance of Discourses



Emperor Sikandar was Cured of Inflammations



Warm Welcome by Sikandar



Shaikh Taqui Tests Kabir Sahab by an Intoxicated Elephant to Crush Him

Courtesy: Shree Ramswarupdasji, "Glimpse of the life of Sadguru Kabir", Kabir Asram - Kabir Road, Jamnagar Gujarat, India. 1990

SECTION I

Scholars from the East and West on Kabir

Preliminaries to the Kabir Studies

Dr. Radhekant Dave, PhD, Ithaca, New York

Introduction

Sadguru Shri Kabir Saheb (15th cent.) was no doubt the people's poet, the people's religious leader, and the people's spokesperson in medieval age in India. He was both the most controversial and popular in his lifetime, but was forgotten for a while after his death, and was rediscovered in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Once again he regained his popularity and became the same controversial! Numerous articles and monographs have been written on him by Indian and foreign scholars. Still, the general reader or a Bhakta of Kabir-panth finds it difficult to understand him. This article is written for such a person.

History Of Kabir Studies

After his death, Kabir's "writings" were put under the protection of his chief disciples. Probably they considered them as holy and sacred. They also wanted to save his writings from changes, and have considered them as gopaniya (secret). The upper class Hindus and staunch Muslims did not care to know what happened to Kabir's writings. Since there was no other radical revolutionary person around after Kabir's death, the upper class, especially the Brahmins must be having a sigh of relief. Hardly there are any important studies of Kabir made during the medieval age. Only some historians have written about Kabir in their books: Nabhadas in his Bhaktamal, Abdul Fazl in his Ain-i-Akbari, and Muhsin Fani's Dabistan-i-Muzahib are three of them. Perhaps the first credit of discovering Kabir goes to the westerners. Padre Marco, an Italian visitor to India in 1758-1775 found him. The other scholars who wrote about Kabir were: Dr. J.B. Gilbert, H.H. Wilson, E. Trumpp, Garcin de Tassy, and a group of Christian missionaries, such as, Reverends Ahmad Shah, Wescott, Prem Chand and the linguist G. Grierson in India, Acharyas Kshitimohan Sen, Rama Chandra Shukla, Rahula Sankrityayana, Hazariprasad Dwivedi and Drs. Rama Kumar Varma, Pitambar Datt Barthwal, Shri Shyam Sundar Das and others. The poet Rabindranath Tagore translated one hundred songs of Kabir, but his selection is not considered to be authentic.

In the initial stage of the Kabir studies, the scholars were not able to fully explain some of his writings, which referred to Hathayoga of the Naths. They were not aware of the Naths, although they knew about the Sahajiya Siddhas. After the discovery of the Nath Sampradaya, everything became clear.

Because the manuscripts of Kabir's works were not available from his disciples, the researchers had to be content with whatever was available to them. This trend of secrecy was common among disciples of all gurus, including the Jainis and the Buddhists. Any way, the manuscripts of Kabir's writings were found in Kashi, in Punjab (in Guru Granth Saheb) and in Rajastham (with the followers of Dadu Dayal). There are no Ramainis in Granth Saheb.

Various scholars published Kabir-Granthavali from various places, but the Kabir-panthis did not accept them as authentic. After some time they released the Bijak of Kabir. Bijak is considered to be the Veda of Kabiramata. It is considered to be more authentic than other manuscripts. This Bijak of Bhagatahi Parampara or tradition, preserved by Kabir's two disciples Bhagwandas (Bhaggodas) and Jagannath Saheb, has been edited with commentaries by various scholars as well as the Mahants or heads of the Kabira Sampradaya. The Acharyas of Kabira pantha also claim to have preserved the tradition of the true meaning and interpretation of Kabir's works, which is very helpful to the students and researchers. "Oral writings" are always susceptible to charges. It is not possible to find 100% authentic works of an "oral writer". There is only one exception to this and that is the Vedas. They have remained more or less intact because of a special way of their recitation was developed and religiously followed. Although there was no such tradition for preserving Bijak, it might have gone through less changes at least after it went into hands of Bhaggodas Saheb and Jagannath Saheb. I have however, doubts about even the Bijak to be an authentic collection of Kabir's sayings. Whenever an old handwritten manuscript got too old to be used, the scribes made new copy of it, and threw away the old one into the river. There are all chances for errors, interpolations and omissions.

We must note here that Bijak was perhaps first discovered by Reverend Ahmad Shah, and was translated and published in the year 1911 A.D. Perhaps the researchers did not consider it as authentic and ignored this important document of the Bhagatahi tradition. Shukdeva Singh rediscovered it, edited and published it in the seventies for the first time for which he deserves great appreciation.

Kabir-Panth Today

It is not known whether any Muslim devotee or disciple of Kabir got manuscripts of Bijak and other works, and if so, what happened to them. Dr. Ram Kumar Varma has given a map in his book *Sant Kabir*, which shows

Kabir's Ashrama at several places in Pakistan. We do not know whether they belonged to the Muslim Mahants or Hindu and what is their present status. Similarly, we have no information about the Muslim heritage or Kabir in India, except that there is a dargah of Kabir at Maghar. In India, Gujarat seems to be surprisingly a state where numerous Kabir Ashrams and temples are found – perhaps more than in any other state. Interested persons may see the map given by Dr. Ram Kumar Varma in *Sant Kabir*. Although not updated after 1957, it might be useful. There are approximately three million Kabir-panthis in India, and several hundred outside India. Most of them are in the Southern California in the United States. The Kabir mandir or Kabir temple was being inaugurated in June, 1994 near Los Angeles. It seems as an Anti-Kabirian deed, or an act of breaking away from Kabir's tradition but Bhaktas have their own explanation. That would be a misconception, and an injustice to the Bhaktas. This is simply an effort for creating a commonplace of worship, prayer, satsang (spiritual companionship) and also for having a research center for those interested in the research in Kabir and Kabir-panth.

Also the devotees of Kabir Saheb from Shree Ram-Kabir Bhakta Samaj of U.S.A. established a Bhakta Cultural Center in November 2002 in Norwalk, Los Angeles area.

A chitra or painting of Kabir exists in collection of the Bharat-Itihas-Sanshodhak-Mandal, Pune, which was reproduced by Dr. Varma in *Sant Kabir*. As it was a part of Nana Phadnavis's collection, one can accept it as a trustworthy Chitra, depending on the artist's ability of painting and so many other factors. It shows Kabir sitting in a side posture with some kind of a four-string tamboura in his hands. His cap is not as long and couch-shaped as that seen in recent pictures. No halo around him. No emblems, such as sat-nam. He is sitting on a wooden seat with a back pillow nothing else in the picture.

Bijak with English translation published from Jamnagar, Gujarat shows more modern picture of Kabir-Satyanam (Satnam), the motto of Kabir-panth at the top of the throne of Kabir in a globe of earth; Kabir sitting in a lotus posture or padmasana; Kabir's right hand in the upadesha-mudra or preaching mudra and left hand in abhaya-mudra re-assuring posture; Kabir's charana padukas or wooden sandals lying on the floor. The words satya, abhaya, ahimsa, ekata, ekeshwarvad and vishwabandhutva can be seen written around the throne. The words indicate what the Kabir-mat stands for today : truth, non-fear, non-violence, unity, one God and universal brotherhood. There are two temples (probably one Kabir temple, the other one Hindu), a mosque and a church in the background. There is a halo around Kabir Saheb, a garland and a Tilak on his forehead.

Some of the epithets and titles used today for Kabir and for the Mahants (heads) of the Kabir-Ashrams are as follows:

- Sadguru Shri Kabir Saheb
- Svasamveda Shrimad Bijak ke upadeshta Yugadrishta Sadguru Kabir Parameshwar
- Kabir Panth Pradhanacharya Pandit Shri Hajura Shri 1008 Shri Prakshamaninam Saheb
- Sadguru Paramatma Mahanta Shri 108 Shri Ramsvarupdasji Maharaj Saheb
- Pandit Shri Hajur Uditnam Saheb

Kabir's Life And Times

The Madhya yuga in Indian History is the dark period for the social, political, religious and spiritual life. Illiteracy, ignorance and socio-religious insecurity made the common man confused and helpless. Although India appeared flourishing under the Muslim rule, common man did not flourish either socially or economically. Muslim aggressions, Muslim reign, atrocities committed by the Muslim rulers and forceful conversions to Islam added to the chaotic situation. Among Hindus only the Brahmans were learned and gained the highest place in hierarchy of the varnas. The Kshatriyas enjoyed very high respect in political and military matters. The Vaishyas were wealthy although their social status was much lower than the higher two classes. The shudras and Ati-shudras (untouchables) were the lowest varna, had no place in the society, and were looked down. Note that each of these varnas were divided in numerous castes and sub-castes. The lowest varna people were also illiterate.

Ramanujacharya was an exponent of the Advaita Vedanta of his own school, different from Shankaracharya's Advaita, although both talked about the Nirguna Brahman. Due to Ramanuja's influence, Vaisnavism flourished. Rama and Krishna, the two avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu, were being worshipped. Swami Ramanand was the immediate disciple of Ramanuja. But he felt the need for socio-religious reform, so departed from his guru and started the reformist movement. It is said that he accepted disciples from the lower castes. Sena, Raidas, Pipa, Kabir, etc. were given diksha by Ramanand Swami. Many learned scholars question this. They argue that it was not possible for Swami Ramananda to be able to live for so many years to preach to so many persons. Physically it does not seem to be possible. However, there are clear indications that Ramanand lived a very long life, probably a life of 118 or 120 years. If that is true, he gave diksha to Kabir's predecessors as well as to Kabir. This means that Swamiji were 96 years old when Kabir was born, and 118 years old when he gave Kabir diksha (note that most of Ramanand's disciples were from the low castes).

We are not going to discuss Kabir's life in detail in this article. Hopefully only a few indications will be enough to read more about it. Here I would like to mention two opposite viewpoints:

There is a belief that Kabir was born to a widow Brahmin woman who abandoned him. A Muslim couple adopted him. There is another belief that he was born in a Muslim Kari or Julaha (low caste weavers) family. Either this caste or this particular family was influenced on the one hand by the Hathayoga philosophy of the Naths, and some sort of Vaishnavite influence on the other, because Kabir's father was known as Gusai. Kabir married twice, and had two children. Some believe that Kabir was born in Kashi but died in Maghar. According to others, he was born in Maghar and also died there.

Kabir-panthis do not agree with the views given above. They are not clear about the birth of Kabir, but if he was born, he came as an avatara or incarnation of the Sat-Purusha or supreme Purusha. He did not die. Flowers were found in place of his body. His Muslim followers buried half of them and the other half cremated by his Hindu followers. About his married life, Pt. Shri Prakashmaninamasheba writes:

"Some gentlemen try to prove that Kabira Saheba was a married person by producing an evidence of an interpolated Sakhi. This is absolutely against all the teachings, preaching and works of Kabir Saheba." (Quote without romanization).

Reconciliation between the two viewpoints is necessary.

It is interesting to note that Kabir went to Maghar in his last days to disprove the superstition from people's mind that one who dies in Kashi attains Moksha, while one who dies in Maghar gets reborn as a donkey.

Understanding Kabir

This section will not provide the reader with a key to unlock all the treasures of Kabir. All one has to do is to read Kabir, to read about the explanations given by others, and form one's own opinion independently about Kabir's teachings – irrespective of what others say about him. If there is any key to understanding anyone in the world, this is it!

Kabir did not read the Hindu or Muslim scriptures, nor had he any training in any school of religion or philosophy. Kabir was not a dogmatic, religious preacher or philosopher. Whatever he said, he said it with intuitive insight. His intuition had deep roots in his worldly experiences and observations of the man and the society. He saw, he thought deeply over whatever he saw, and expressed himself loud and clear. He was an original thinker, and substantiated his statements with solid examples. Except for the passages referring to the Hathayoga, Kabir should not be a problem to anyone. Those interested in reading those poems may have to sit down with dictionaries of

Kabir's terms. For all others, the rest should not be a big problem. We have to remember that the Hathayogic Sadhana was not the objective of Kabir. He was not a Nathyogi. Nor was he an Advaita Vedantins. He did not expound the philosophy of Sufism or Islam. He just made use of all these to say whatever he wanted to say. I think primarily he was a Bhakta and a reformist.

Both Islam and Advaita Vedanta propagate for one God. Advaita Vedanta differs from Islam in propagation of the Nirguna Brahman. But in Hindu mythology, one God has many forms. The Advaita Vedanta says that the Supreme Being is Absolute, devoid of all forms and qualities, and is omnipotent and omniscient. The self is not different from Brahman, but the self is Brahman. The Jiva can realize this when the illusion created by Maya is removed (there are more than one schools of Advaita). As we have just said, one God takes many forms, and Lord Vishnu gets incarnated. Kabir was a theist, but did not believe in pantheism, Avatara, idol worship, etc. He would not accept the authority of either the Vedas or the Koran, still he was not considered to be a *nastik* or atheist like Charwaka, Buddhists, or Jainis. We do not have any information as to how much Islam he himself practiced, but he has been referred to as a *Muwahheed* in *Dabistan*.

Sufism is a system of Islamic mysticism, first practiced in Persia, and then traveled to India. Sufis are Muslim faquirs or ascetics who practice Sufism. Their *ishq* or love for God is so intense that the torment of separation from Him is unbearable to them. Pain or *Viraha* has also roots in India literary, folk and religious tradition, especially in the Vaishnav tradition. Just as a lover yearns for union with his beloved, so does a Bhakta for the Lord.

Next, some of the basic principles of Hathayoga will be explained. For the sake of brevity, the explanation of its symbolism and the English translation of the terms have not been given.

Hathayoga is a Sadhana of waking up one's Kundalini, which has the form of a female serpent. The journey of the awakened Kundalini goes upwards through various Chakras or Yantrars, six to eight in number. The first Chakra is called *Muladhara Chakra*, and the sixth is *Agya Chakra* or *Agha Chakra*. The *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Sushumna Nadis* are the *Ganga*, *Yamuna* and *Saraswati Rivers*. *Ida* and *Pingala* are also the sun and the moon. When the Kundalini pierces the sixth Chakra, it is said to have reached in *Prayaga* for the affluence of the three rivers takes place there. In the human body, this place is between the eyebrows. The cavity above it is called the *Sahasradala Kamala* or *Chakra* (which might be the seventh Chakra). After reaching there, the yogi can hear the *Anahata Nada*, drink the *Amrita* and become *Amara*. By the way, the Kundalini Shakti gets united with the *Parama Shiva*.

Now we know that the philosophical background in Kabir's writings was mainly threefold; Sufi and Islamic, The Advaita-Vedantic and the Hathayogic. In addition to that, one finds influence of the Shaivagams and *Devi Upasana*.

All of these and other philosophical thinking have given shape to his philosophical and religious teachings.

Various editions of Kabir-Granthavali are based on Bijak. Thus Bijak is authentic compilation of Kabir's teachings. For a Kabir-panthi, Kabir does not have one avatar; he descends this world in every yuga. Al-Kabir is an Arabic word which is one of the epithets of Allah, and means "Great". Bijak is a "coded document pointing to the hidden treasure" as has been explained by Pt. Shri Prakashaminama Saheb (P. Saheb in this article). Bijak is a collection of the Ramainis, Sabads and Sakhis. In addition to these three, Jnana-Chauntisa, Vipramtisi, Kahara, Vasanta, Cacara, Beli, Birhaulti and Hindola also form part of Bijak, and perhaps need a critical examination and scrutiny by the researchers. We shall talk about Ramaini, Sabad and Sakhi. Ramaini is the one which wanders around, in the Sansar, in the Shastras, or in the thoughts of a person—anywhere! Sabad or Shabda is the pada of the bhaktas, the devotional songs. Sabad also means the highest word or preaching. Sakhi or Sakshi is the one which has a watchful eye and also which is a witness of so many happenings in this universe. Kabir has very peculiar ideas about the origin and nature of this universe (cosmogony and cosmology), and the nature of the Supreme Reality or God. Although these are scattered in all of these three types of writings, most of the teachings about the cosmogony and cosmology may be found in Ramainis. The Sabads (and) Sakhis deal with the ontology, and the Sakhis (and Sabads) deal with the Jiva and Jagat. There are, however, no strict divisions.

Here, we shall have only a brief explanation of the nature of God according to Kabir-panthis, as it also explains the motto of the panth. According to P. Saheb, Satyanama is the "personal name of Atman", which is the Pure sentient. There is nothing greater than this. This is the "Pure, unqualified sentient Supreme Self". The Supreme Self has no beginning and no end (the maya has no beginning but has an end).

Rama should not be taken to mean the son of the King Dasharatha, according to Pt. Shri Saheba. "The primary meaning of 'Rama' is: 'the Pure Sentient'". [see The Bijaka of Kabir Saheba in the suggested reading at the end of these article.] By analogy this statement applies to all names occurring in Bijak: Rahim, Govind etc., etc.

Ramainis are written in Chaupai-Doha style, shabdas are padas and sakhis are written in Doha style. The chaupai-Doha style has no particular order, and is used by Kabir only for the second time in literature after Maulana Daud's Chandayan.

According to the Kabir-mat, a word about the place of Guru, understanding Kabir is understanding Guruism! The saints of the medieval age put their guru above everything and above all, but it was Sant Kabir who exhaled raised the status of the guru more than what his predecessors did.

I am pondering over a question since a long time: Is it possible that Kabir might have started with the writings on Hathayoga, then gradually he moved to the Advaita Vedanta, and finally moved to the Bhakti-marg? If so, many puzzling questions and problems about Kabir's views and continuity get solved. Now this is in no way possible to prove, as Kabir's works are compilations, and these compilations have not been made in chronological order. Hence, this remains only as a speculation.

Is Bhakti of Nirguna Brahman Possible? Logically, no. One cannot be a devotee of Brahman which has no form, which has no attributes and qualifications etc., etc. There is no way one can worship a Supreme Reality who simultaneously exists as well as does not exist! The only solution to this problem is the one which we found in case of the great Acharya Shankara. If the stotras written by Shankara are actually written by him, then he allowed himself to come down from the level of Jnana to the level of Bhakti (of the Saguna Brahman). We may have to say this for Kabir too.

The last difficulty in understanding Kabir seems to be his language. Partly this seems to be a wrong assumption that Kabir wrote in old Hindi. Apart from whatever Kabir wrote in Hindi or in Khadi Boli (if he really wrote in it), he also wrote in Brij and Avadhi. Brij and Avadhi are independent languages. Linguistically they are not the dialects of Khadi Boli Hindi.

Languages in Kabir's time were not fully cultivated. Kabir, like his predecessors and contemporaries, had to do a pioneering work to cultivate them and make suitable to the literature. Also, Kabir wanted to use the spoken language of the common man. And, he did not write, he just spoke. Bijak, although protected like mantrakshara, has undergone several recensions. Luckily, the tradition of its interpretation and its meaning has been preserved by the Kabir-panthis as well as the scholars.

(For Bibliography and References, Pl. see Appendix A)

Kabir — Life and Philosophy

Dr. Hakam Singh

Among the standard bearers of the Bhakti Movement of the medieval period in India, Kabir's name is probably the most well-known and the most revered. His greatness lies in the fact that Muslims as well as Hindus revere him equally. The regard in which Guru Nanak held Kabir is amply illustrated by the fact that Guru Nanak visited Banaras, Kabir's hometown for most of his life, and there he collected Kabir's utterances. Guru Nanak's regard is further evidenced by the fact that this collection was preserved and passed on to the successor Gurus, until the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, who included it in the anthology that he compiled and which is now known as "Guru Granth Sahib", and is considered the eternal Shabad Guru by Sikhs.

As a mystic, Kabir is ranked among the topmost Bhagats of his era. As a literary figure, he is sometimes equated to the doyens of Hindi poets, like Gusain Tulsi Das. His couplets (Dohas or Shaloks) became so popular among the masses, that many copycats started composing couplets in his name. As a result, it soon became very difficult to differentiate the authentic from the spurious ones. However, since Guru Nanak reached Banaras almost at the same time when Kabir was, either still alive living at Maghar (his final days) or had recently passed away. Thus the proliferation of copycats would not have yet started. Furthermore, Guru Nanak's eagle eye must have separated the grain from the chaf. It can therefore be believed with high probability that the utterances of Kabir included in the Guru Granth Sahib are genuine.

According to some Sikh sources (Janam Sakhis), Guru Nanak met Kabir when he visited Banaras and had a dialogue with him. The tone of this dialogue has prompted some Western writers to infer that the dialogue was deliberately composed to establish Nanak's superiority over Kabir¹. However, the authenticity of these sources is questionable. Further, there is contrary evidence that supports the assertion that, Kabir and Guru Nanak may never have met².

In Guru Granth Sahib, there are only a few hymns by Kabir, which describe some important episodes that occurred in his life. Bhai Gurdas has also written one pauri (stanza) concerning a particular aspect of Kabir's life. To construct the life story of Kabir therefore, one has to get help from sources outside of Guru Granth Sahib. Although there are sources available, including some publications by Western authors, this task made daunting by the fact that Kabir Panthi literature itself is full of discrepancies.

Kabir's life story is an enigma. Traditional folklore does not seem to be supported by Kabir's own writings in Guru Granth Sahib. McCauliff, in the biographical sketch of Kabir, writes that he was born in May 1398, spent most of his life in Banaras and only towards his last days, for the first time, moved to Maghar (near Gorakh Pur) where he passed away in November 1518. However, according to Kabir's own account, he was born in Banaras, and lived in Maghar not once but two times. During his first abode he attained to the vision of the Supreme Reality.

*"Relying on you O Lord, I took abode in Maghar and you quenched the
fire of my mind.
I first obtained your vision in Maghar and then came to live in Banaras".*

(SGGS, P 969.)

And

*I wasted all my life in the city of Shiva (Banaras).
At the time of death I moved to Maghar.*

(SGGS, P.326.)

Guru Nanak, during his first odyssey, which covered the period 1507 to 1515, covered almost all sacred Hindu places in India including Banaras. Whether he met Kabir or not, is difficult to conclude from any available historical record. Kabir himself has not mentioned the name of Guru Nanak in any of his composition and Guru Nanak has also not mentioned Kabir in any of his composition. By the time Guru Nanak visited Banaras, he was already a renowned religious reformer. If the two had met, one of them would have mentioned about their meeting. It is therefore safe to assume that the two did not meet.

Birth:

A fantastic story is prevalent in the traditional folklore regarding Kabir's birth. According to this story, a Brahmin, who was a devotee of Swami Rama Nand and lived in Banaras, had a young daughter who became widowed soon after marriage. One day he took his daughter with him to pay homage to Swami Rama Nand. As she bowed before the Swami, he blessed her to become the mother of a pious son. Thus, the boon of Swami Rama Nand resulted in the birth of a baby boy to this virgin widowed girl. The mother, for fear of reprisal from the society, abandoned the newborn on the bank of a lake outside Banaras. A Muslim weaver and his wife³ who were passing by saw the baby and took

it to their home. They had no children of their own, and brought this child up as their own son.

Kabir, Hindu or Muslim:

The term Kabir is of Arabic origin (meaning great). It seems unlikely that in those times, a Hindu boy would be given an Arabic name, and hence it is quite likely that Kabir was named and raised by Muslims. However, when Kabir's own composition from Guru Granth Sabih are studied, not only do we not find a single hymn in support of this story, but there is no support for the premise that Kabir was a Muslim either.

If we accept that this story is true, that a Muslim weaver couple picked up an abandoned baby boy and brought it up as their own son, then according to Muslim rites of passage Kabir would have undergone the ceremony of circumcision at a very young age. But in Guru Granth Sabih there is a hymn by Kabir which seems to indicate that he was not circumcised. This hymn could have been composed at the time when Kabir was asked to undergo this ceremony and he was old enough to accept or reject it:

"Circumcision is practiced because of love of woman. I do not acknowledge any other reason. If God wished me to be a Muslim by circumcision, what is to be done to a woman? We cannot desert woman that is our other half, therefore better remain Hindu".

(SGGS, P.477)

It is possible that in Kabir's village many of his relatives converted to Islam and he was also pressured to become a Muslim by undergoing the ceremony of circumcision.

Caste system is an integral part of Hindu society only. When one converts to Islam, the idea of caste is to be completely abandoned. Thus, after conversion, a Brahmin does not call himself a Brahmin any more, nor would a Shudra refer to himself as a shudra.

However, Kabir in his hymns clearly says that he is a Shudra:

*How is it that you are a Brahmin and I am a Shudra?
Do I have blood in my veins and you have milk?*

(SGGS, P.324)

If we look at the names that Kabir has used for God in his utterances, we find that they are mostly those used by Hindus, viz., Ram, Gobind, Hari,

Nayaran, Thakur etc. Only in very few hymns does Kabir use the Muslim names, Allah, Karim, Raheem etc. On the other hand, the hymns in Guru Granth Sabih of Shaikh Farid, a Muslim Sufi faqir, describe or address God only Muslim names.

Kabir seems to possess a remarkable knowledge of Hindu scriptures and mythology. It is hard to comprehend that in those times, a Muslim young boy, belonging to a poor family of weavers, could have access to the sources of such information. Even for a Hindu belonging to the Shudra class to have access to such knowledge is hard to imagine. But the probability seems extremely low for a Muslim.

Kabir openly condemns idol worship, casteism and empty ritualism of Hinduism. He also criticizes narrow-mindedness and bigotry of Islam, but whenever he compares himself, it is always with a Brahmin (Hindu) and describes himself, implicitly or explicitly, a Shudra:

*We are herd of cows and you the cowherd, our guardian in each age.
Never have you taken us across to liberation. What kind of guardian are you?*

*You are a Brahmin and I only a weaver of Kashi; learn this wisdom from
me. You ever beg at the doors of rulers, the masters of land while in God have I
fixed my contemplation.*

(SGGS, P. 482)

Kabir, in a direct confrontation, challenges the superiority of conceited Brahmins:

*If you are a Brahmin, born of Brahmini mother, then why did you not
come to this world by a different mode (compared to a Shudra).*

(SGGS, P.324)

One of the notable points in Kabir's utterances is that whenever he writes about death and the associated rite of passage, it is always the Hindu ceremony of cremation and not the Muslim way of burial:

*Even the limbs of body anointed with sandalwood oil
Will burn with firewood.*

(SGGS, P.326.)

Or

The bones burn like a bundle of firewood and hair burn like a sheaf of hay.

(SGGS, P.870)

And

The bones burn like wood and the hair like straw.

(SGGS, P.1366)

In spite of all this overwhelming circumstantial evidence, the mystery of Kabir's birth and religious upbringing is not easily resolvable. In Guru Granth Sahib, a hymn by Bhagat Ravi Das, a contemporary of Kabir, indicates that Kabir was a Muslim:

He in whose family Id (Id-ul-fitr) and Bakarid (goat sacrificing Id or Id-ul-zaha) were celebrated and whose people slaughtered cows and venerated Sheikhs, Muslim martyrs and Pirs; his father used to practice such things, yet his son Kabir acted such (so differently) that he became celebrated world over.

(SGGS, P.1293)

Prof. Sahib Singh has tried to explain this paradox⁴ (with whatever success) by saying that Bhagat Ravi Das is using the terms 'family people' and father in connection with the observance of Muslim festivals and slaughtering of cows only symbolically. He is actually indicating that in Kabir's clan a large number of his relatives had converted to Islam and they observed all the Muslim festivals.

Even western writers have not escaped this controversy. While some are of the opinion that Kabir was a Muslim⁵, others think him to be Hindu⁶.

We can conclude by saying that whatever his birth or religion, Kabir grew to be a torchbearer of the Bhakti movement in India, more of the Hinduism than of Islam.

Kabir's Guru:

The third Nanak, Guru Amar Das, in one of his hymns says:

Nam Dev the calico printer and Kabir the weaver attained to the exalted (spiritual) state through a perfect Guru. By recognizing His name they realized

*the Formless. They shunned their ego and shed the stigma of their low caste.
Gods and men chant their utterances no one can efface them, brother.*

(SGGS, P. 67)

Who was this perfect Guru of Kabir? In Sikh folklore, in order to get the answer to this question, we have to look towards the Sikh savant, Bhai Gurdas. According to Bhai Gurdas, Swami Rama Nand was Kabir's Guru. In one of his poetic compositions (vars) he describes the interesting story of how Kabir received the "Guru Mantra" from Swami Rama Nand⁷.

According to this story, Kabir wanted to receive Guru Mantra from a true preceptor of the time. He heard that Rama Nand was such a person. But Rama Nand, being a Brahmin, would not accept Kabir, a Shudra, as his disciple. Kabir then carefully observed the daily routine of Swami. He found out that early every morning, Rama Nand went to the River Ganges to take a bath. One night Kabir lay down on the footpath where Rama Nand passed every morning. That morning, when Rama Nand was passing by, he saw someone (Kabir) lying on the path). He touched Kabir with his foot and said, "Get up you Ram's creature and recite Ram's Name". Kabir took the word 'Ram', uttered by Swami Rama Nand, as the Guru Mantra and meditated on it with single-minded concentration that he soon reached the spiritual level of Rama Nand.

Mohsin Fani in Dabistan-i-Mazahib also says that Rama Nand was guru of Kabir, and so also was believed by many. But Kabir never mentions in his compositions if Rama Nand was his guru although in Kabir Bijak the name of Rama Nand comes at least three times. Also according to Prabhakar Machwe⁸, Kabir transformed the 'Sagun Ram (God)' of Rama Nand to Nirgun (formless), beyond varunas and indescribable one. He considered God as Shabad (word). This, however, still does not explicitly say that Rama Nand was not Kabir's guru.

A historical analysis of Bhai Gurdas' account indicates that the incident of "Guru Mantra" must have occurred when Kabir was very young since Rama Nand passed away when Kabir was only 12 years old. It would appear very unlikely that a young boy brought up by Muslim parents (no matter how liberal), was so eager to get Guru Mantra from a Hindu Guru. Thus lending further support to Kabir's having been raised as a Hindu.

Some glimpses of Kabir's life:

Kabir's parents lived in Kashi (Banaras). It is most likely that he lived with them all through his childhood. Also, as already discussed, he got Guru Mantra when he was not yet a teen-ager. It is therefore possible that sometime after

receiving Guru Mantra, he went to Magher (the first time) where he meditated on it with such intensity that he achieved the 'nirvana' state of mind:

*Now sitting on the (celestial throne) I have met the sustainer of the world.
The Lord and Kabir have become one, no one can tell them apart.*

(SGGS, p. 969)

He then came back to Banaras and spent a major portion of his life there. But towards his last days he moved back to Maghar (the second time). The reason for this move seems to be that among Hindus the belief was that those who died in Kashi went to heaven while those dying in Maghar would take birth as a jackass. Never believing in such useless superstitions he was also bold enough to show by practice, that he condemned such ideas. Therefore, when he realized that his final day was not too far, he moved to Maghar and composed this hymn:6

*People say that I didn't practice any penance therefore I am leaving
Banaras (Kashi) just as an unfortunate fish leaves water. Lord! What shall
now happen to me? The unwise that I am I have left Banaras where I spent
my whole life. But toward the end of life I have come to Maghar. For many
years I performed austerities in Kashi but close to death I have taken abode in
Maghar. I take Kashi and Maghar to be the same. No one can go across with-
out sincere devotion. Everyone including my Guru, Ganesh and Shiva know
that Kabir died uttering the Lord's name (therefore he cannot escape heaven
even if he died in Maghar).*

(SGGS, p. 326)

Kabir was a firm believer of one formless God and preached his belief boldly, in spite knowing that the consequences for such preaching could be grave. He was not afraid of threats from Brahmins or Mullas. Even death threat had no effect on his resolve. This is amply evident from some of his hymns:

*The true hero is one who fights in defense of the oppressed.
He dies cut limb by limb but does not flee the field.*

(SGGS, P. 1105)

Kabir's open rejection of both Hindu and Muslim practices which encouraged sectarian hatred, and his fearless preaching that without Bhakti (devotion) there was no religion, resulted in his great popularity among the masses who

were sick and tired of the yoke of Brahmins and fatwas of Mullas, on slightest pretext. At the same time, it also made him a target of jealousy and animosity by both Brahmins and Mullas. In fact, the Mullas lodged complaints against Kabir with the Muslim judge of Banaras. The judge (qazi) declared him guilty of sedition and sentenced him to imprisonment. Later Kabir was brought before the Sultan (king) Sikandar Lodhi, a vain and bigoted Muslim zealot. When Kabir refused to bow before him, the Sultan was furious and ordered the judge (Qazi) to issue a Fatwa for Kabir's death because he had insulted Islam*. Kabir in one of his hymns describes the punishments passed on him and how he was miraculously saved:

*To mother Ganga (Ganges), deep and profound.
Was Kabir taken bound in chains. (was thrown in Ganges)
When the mind is not afraid, why the body should fear?
My mind is absorbed in the Lotus feet (of God).
My chains were snapped by the waves of Ganges,
and I (Kabir) was sitting in a deer skin (amidst Ganga).
Says Kabir, No one else is friend or companion.
On land or water Lord is our preserver.*

(SGGS, P. 1162)

Thus Kabir was first thrown in the river Ganges to drown; but by a miracle he could not be drowned. He was then tied up into a bundle and thrown before an intoxicated elephant. This time also he came out unscathed:

*With hands bound, made me into a bundle, I was thrown before an
elephant.
The elephant was furiously goaded in the head.
The elephant ran trumpeting.
I am a sacrifice to this image of God.
Says Kabir, Lord! In you alone is my strenght.
The qazi was shouting at the mahout to goad on the elephant,
threatening him, "I shall cut you into pieces,
goad and drive the elephant".
The elephant would not move, and went into meditation.
In his heart was lodged the Lord.
What sin has the saint committed (ask people),
that bound like that he is thrown before the elephant?
The elephant picked up the bundle (Kabir) and made obeisance to it.
Even then the blind qazi did not realize.
Three time he fully tried it.*

*Even then his hard heart was not softened.
Says Kabir, the Lord is my protector.
In absorption in Him lies His servant's life.*

(SGGS, P.870)

Kabir himself is testifying to the two episodes in his life when by a miracle* God saved him from what would have been certain death.

Kabir's Family:

Although in Guru Granth Sahib there is no explicit statement about Kabir's family, according to the tradition he was a householder. His wife's name was Loe and he had a son Kamal and a daughter Kamalee. In some of his hymns Kabir describes the reaction of some of his family members on his single-minded quest for the state of equipoise through recitation of God's name and meditating on it in the company of holy people who visited him often. He totally forgot his trade (of weaving) when he was in such company.

In a few hymns, Kabir describes how his mother felt about his daily routine and day to day conduct of spending most of his time in the company of holy persons, reciting the Name of the Lord and ignoring his ancestral trade of weavers:

Each day after getting up he (Kabir) brings a fresh pitcher# and spends his life in plastering the place (with water). He has completely put out of his mind the profession of weaving and is involved in the joy of God's Name. In our clan who has ever contemplated Ram (God)? Ever since this good-for-nothing son has taken up the rosary peace has vanished (from our house). (pause). Listen, sisters, wives of my husband's brothers, something strange has happened. This boy has ruined our occupation of weavers, why did this brat not die?

Kabir says (to his mother): The Lord is the Master of all joys, His Name, my preceptor has imparted to me. He is the same who saved the saintly Prahlaad's honor and with claws tore apart Harnakash. I have abandoned the gods of the ancestors of my house and taken to my preceptor's instruction. Says Kabir, the Lord is the destroyer of all sins. He emancipates his saints.

(SGGS, p. 856)

Thus, Kabir got up early in the morning every day, went to the river (Ganges) and brought a pitcher full of water with which he plastered the place of his meditation. This daily routine gives a further boost to the theory that

Kabir was not a Muslim; because only Hindus plaster their places of meditation with water or cow dung.

According to Kabir his mother complained to him that he had been spoiled in the company of holy persons (Sants) because as far as she was concerned he had become totally useless he completely forgot his ancestral trade. Kabir's answer is given in the following hymn:

*River Yamuna, by joining Ganga (Ganges) changed its form,
and ended in becoming Ganga itself.
Kabir in the Name of God, has also changed.*

*He has acquired the form of the eternal Lord,
Now he does not stray elsewhere. (Pause).
A tree changed in the company of sandalwood tree.
That tree has ended in becoming (fragrant) like sandalwood.
Copper changed in the company of the philosopher's stone.
That copper ended as gold.
In the company of holy persons Kabir has changed.
Kabir has ended as image of the Lord Himself.*

(SGGS, P.1158)

When Kabir's mother failed to win in argument she started sobbing and crying. She asked Kabir that if he totally abandoned his trade of weavers, as he often did, his children would starve; because there was no other source of income. The following hymn describes this encounter of Kabir with his mother:

In silent sobs weeps Kabir's mother, crying: Lord! How shall these children stay alive?

Kabir has totally discarded spinning and weaving and has recorded God's Name on his self (devoted completely to contemplation of God). (Pause). The time when I pass the thread through the bobbin, that time I forget by beloved Lord. Shallow is my understanding, my caste is weaver's. The Divine Name is my sole profit. Says Kabir, listen my mother! For me and for these (children) God alone is the provider.

(SGGS, P.524)

According to tradition Kabir was a householder (as indicated by the already quoted hymns). His wife's name was Loe and he had two children, a

son who went by the name of Kamal, and a daughter whose name was Kamalee. In Guru Grant Sahib there are at least four hymns of Kabir where he has used the word "Loee", and one salok wherein he uses the word 'Kamal'.

It is noteworthy that the word Loee, in addition to being a proper noun (name of a person), also means, the 'people' or the 'world'. Even in several hymns of Gurus the word 'Loee' is used and the meaning is always the same, the world or the people:

Eko hukam vartai sabh loee.

(SGGS, P. 223)

Aasaa vich sutte kae loee.

(SGGS, P. 423)

Khand Brahmand Paatal Deep raviala sabh loee.

(SGGS, P. 706)

The meaning of the word 'loee' in all the above cases is perfectly clear. But the way Kabir has used this word in some of his hymns seems to have created confusion in some people. In three of his hymns Kabir uses the same sentence:

Kahet kabir suno re loee.

SGGS, P. 481, 484, 692).

In all these three cases "re" has been used to address "loee". To address a female (Kabir's wife) the word "re" cannot be used. It should be "ree", therefore Kabir is addressing the people in all these three hymns. Unfortunately some earlier Sikh writers not only seem to have ignored this grammatical point but in order to justify their interpretation, spun stories around some hymns. For example, the appropriate meaning of the hymn on page 484 in Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

I would prefer to be cut by a saw than see you turning your back on me. Listen to my supplication and take me into your embrace. Beloved, I and a sacrifice to you; turn your face (towards me). Why torture me by turning away from me? (Pause). Even if you cut my body, shall I not stir a single limb. I shall not break my love even if my body falls. There is no one else between the two

of us. You are the husband and I am the wife. Says Kabir, listen O loee (people or Loe the wife). Now I have no faith in you.

Is that Kabir expressing his intense love with God. He would go through any pain (even to the extent of being sawn off) if his love with the Lord stayed intact. But on the basis of the sentence, 'you are the husband and I am the wife' some people seem to have been carried away, completely forgetting that Kabir has often used symbolically, the relationship between human soul and God as husband and wife, and concocted a story to justify their train of thought. One of the several interesting stories that seem to have been concocted around this hymn and which was quite popular in the early part of twentieth century, went like this:

A sick person once came to Kabir's house to get cured of his incurable malady. He had heard that Kabir's touch or even his sight could cure any incurable disease. When he reached Kabir's house, he met Kabir's wife Loe who told him that Bhagat Ji had gone out and won't be back for a few days. The sick person told her the secret of his visit and said that the chances were that he might not live till Kabir's return. Loe took pity on him, set him down and asked him to repeat the word 'Ram' three times. The sick man did so and lo and behold he was cured of his disease. He went away singing the praises of Loe.

On his way he met Kabir who heard his story. He came home and did not talk with his wife. When Loe came with some food Kabir turned his back. That is when Loe uttered the starting words of the above hymn. The last sentence is attributed to Kabir saying that Loe had lost his faith because she sold "Ram" so cheap that to cure a sick person she used it three times. Whatever this interpretation, it is difficult to deduce from this hymn that Kabir's wife name was indeed Loe.

There is however, another hymn which unequivocally indicates that Loe was indeed the name of Kabir's wife who got sick and tired of feedingscores of mendicants who kept on visiting her house day in day out when often there was not enough to eat even for the family itself. But Kabir first gave, whatever was available, to these ascetics even if the family starved. To make the matters worse, as long as these ascetics stayed in the house Kabir sat with them in meditation and did not do any work. The following hymn portrays the argument between Kabir and Loe:

The yarn is broken, the starch is dried up and at our door bare reeds are glistening. Scattered are hair of the carding comb (because Kabir has not touched the work for days) death appears to haunt this lad. These mendicants have wasted all our property. I am fed up of frequent coming and going of these mendicants. (Pause). He (Kabir) has forgotten the beam and the shuttle. His

heart is absorbed in God's Name. While the children have nothing to eat, these close-shaved mendicants daily eat to their fill. One or two are in the house; while another one or two are arriving or are on their way. We sleep on straw while they on the cots. They caress their heads, religious books tied to their waist. We get only parched grams to munch, while they get bread. The shave-head mendicants and our lad (Kabir) seem to become one. Says Kabir, know, these shaven-head mendicants are the support of the drowning. Says Kabir, listen you Loe, blind, uninstructed in faith, I have sought shelter with these mendicants.

(SGGS, P. 871)

Kabir's Salok 115 (SGGS, P.1370) mentions the name Kamal which, according to the tradition, was the name of his son. Most writers have translated this Salok literally:

Ruined is Kabir's family with son Kamal born therein. Discarding contemplation of the Lord, money had he brought home.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, English Translation, Vol. 4, P.2740, by Gurbachan Singh Talib).

Professor Sahib Singh, on the other hand thinks that Kabir is using the words* "son Kamal" metaphorically. Thus according to him, mind is the son which has abandoned the contemplation of the Lord and instead is running after the worldly attachments. However, Professor Sahib Singh has not denied the existence of Kabir's son whose name could be Kamal.

Kabir's death:

Except for the fact that Kabir died in Maghar, no additional details are available regarding the circumstances of his death in Guru Granth Sahib or any other Sikh source.

An anecdote associated with the death of Kabir indicates the great reverence in which he was held by both Hindus as well as Muslims.

When Kabir felt that his time of demise had arrived, he shut himself inside a hut. He told his devotees, who had gathered in large numbers, not to disturb him. He covered himself with a sheet and discarded his mortal body. After waiting for quite some time, his devotees, both Hindus as well as Muslims, entered the hut and seeing no movement under the sheet, concluded that Kabir had passed away. Now Hindus claimed that Kabir was preceptor and therefore they had the right to cremate his body. The Muslims on the other hand said

that he was their 'Aulia' and therefore must be buried by them. A hot contest followed but some sensible leaders from the two sides averted any unpleasant happening. They removed the sheet, where instead of Kabir's body all they found was a bunch of flowers. Half of these flowers were given to the Hindu leader, Vir Singh, the raja of Banaras who had them cremated. The other half was given to the Muslim leader, Biji Khan, a Pathan noble, who got them buried on the spot at Maghar*.

Kabir's Composition:

There seems to be a difference of opinion among researchers as to the total number of compositions of Kabir in Guru Granth Sahib. According to the Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (Mahan Kosh) the number is 534; Dr. Charan Singh (Sri Guru Granth Bani Beora) reports this number at 540 while Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli (Critical Study of Adi Granth) puts this number at 541. The reason for this discrepancy seems to be as follows:

Under the heading, *slok bag Kabir ji ki* (saloks of bhagat Kabir ji) on page 1364 in Sri Guru Granth Sahib there are 243 saloks. However out of these only 237 are the compositions of Kabir; one (#220) is that of third Nanak, Guru Amar Das and five saloks, #209, 210, 211, 214 and 221, are those of the fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev. Saloks #210, 211 and 214 which are included in Kabir's saloks on pages 1375-76 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib are also entered on page 965 in Ramkali ki Var, Mahalla 5. Some writers have mistakenly counted some or all the saloks of Guru Amar Das and Guru Arjan Dev as Kabir's compositions.

Similarly, In Raga Bhairo there are two shabads (hymns) under the title 'Bhairo Mahalla 5' indicating them to be the compositions of the fifth Nanak. But the last sentences of both these hymns have 'Kabir' instead of 'Nanak', creating doubt regarding their authorship. Some researchers have counted these two hymns in Kabir's compositions while others have not.

A hymn in Gauri Raga (Page 326) is even more confusing. Its heading is, *Gauri Kabir Ji with Fifth Guru's Added (pada)*, and the ending sentence is, "Ram ramat mat pragti aace, kahu Kabir Gur sojhi paaee".

Kabir's Importance in Sikhism

There are fifteen Bhagats whose compositions are included in Guru Granth Sahib.

Among these, Kabir stands out for the following reasons:

The number of his hymns (shabads) and saloks included in Guru Granth Sahib is larger than any other Bhagat. His hymns always come immediately after those of the Gurus themselves and before any other Bhagat. This may be indicative of his rank among Bhagats.

In fact, Kabir is the one of the only two Bhagats^Δ in whose compositions, the Gurus have introduced some explanations and/or additions, indicating the consonance of their ideas with those of the Gurus as stated earlier. While Guru Nanak is known to have met the descendent of Shaikh Farid, his meeting with Kabir is highly improbable. Even then the number of Kabir's hymns wherein Guru Nanak (and other Gurus) have either added a word of explanation or written a separate hymn to clarify some points is such that one is compelled to give some serious thought to find if there is special relationship between Kabir and Guru Nanak.

It seems that when Guru Nanak visited Banaras in or around 1515, Kabir had become quite famous in the region. His poetry was so popular that many street poets had started composing similar poetry in Kabir's name. Guru Nanak came across various compositions of Kabir and found them to be so much similar in ideas to his own that he started collecting them. He scrutinized all that he had collected, rejected those hymns that did not seem authentic to him and kept the ones he thought were authentic. While going through these compositions he also felt that Kabir in many of his hymns given hints about some very important points. He thought that it would be difficult for ordinary people to fully grasp the meaning of these ideas. Therefore he added some words of his own to further explain the hint given by Kabir. When Guru Nanak felt that addition of a few words were not sufficient to clarify an idea he wrote a hymn of his own to do the job. This further indicates the regard Guru Nanak had for Kabir and his utterances.

Endnotes:

1. C. Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.52.

2. W. H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and Sikh Religion*, Oxford, 1968, p.85.

3. The names of this Muslim weaver couple were Niru and Nima.

4. *Guru Granth Darpan*, vol.9, p.352

5. C. Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, Oxford University Press 1993, p.46

6. H. H. Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 2nd Ed., Calcutta, 1958.

* According to Wilson, "his (Kabir's) conversancy with the Hindu Sastras and his evidently limited knowledge of the Muslim authorities in matters of religion renders such a supposition (that kabir was a Mahammedan) as asserted by Malcolm perfectly unwarranted".

7. Var 10, Stanza 15.

* Prabhakar Machwe, *Kabir. Sahitya Akademi*, p.17.

* Although Sikhism does not subscribe to miracles, in *Guru Granth Sahib* there are many hymns wherein occurrence of miracles has been described. For example, in *Asa Chhant* (SGGS, p. 451) the forth Nanak, Guru Ram Das says: "in every age God cre-

ated devotees whose honor He preserved". Then he gives the examples of Prahlad and Nam Dev whose honor God miraculously preserved.

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The term 'fresh pitcher' seems a metaphor. A poor weaver boy who has inclination towards his ancestral work could not afford a fresh (new) picture everyday. Here it seems to mean a clean picture.

* Professor Sahib Singh seems to have taken line of thought because in Kabir's hymns metaphors and allegories have been used very frequently.

* C. Vaudeville: *A Weaver Named Kabir*, Oxford University Press 1993, p. 19.

Δ Shaikh Farid is the other Bhagat.

Kabir, Kabirshah, Kabirdas

Dr. Gunvant Shah

(An educator, philosopher, thinker, writer, public speaker)

Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Gnan, Karma and Bhaki' (knowledge, action and devotion) are the three formative forces, but the human race has been pinched, since centuries, by the practical limitations of those three favored forces – the dryness of the followers of the path of knowledge, love for chore of the disciples of the path of action and shallowness of the believers of the path of devotion. All these three limitations sometimes touch the status of stubbornness of the believers of the path of devotion. Kabir was a 'jnani', 'Karmayogi' and a devotee. He could observe, penetrate and challenge the prevalent deception, hypocrisy and corruption in the socio-religious field of 15th century society.

Unification of devotion and revolution in a single individual could generate a saint like Kabir. The moon light offers soothing cold and the scorching sun light removes germs. Kabir carries the heat and cold of both the sun and the moon, simultaneously. 'The same sheath can't contain two swords' this proverb can't be true for Kabir. He exhibited coldness of devotion and heat of revolution. He could maintain equilibrium between the two. As a mystic he could observe the game of the world with equanimity and neutrality. He has left no stone unturned in unveiling the hypocrisy of the Mahants and the Mullas. The very Kabir sang:

"Sadho, sahaj samadhi bhali."

Kabir belonged to the 15th century. But five centuries later, superstition, blind faith and ignorance still remain. Had Kabir's message reached the hearts of people, there would not have been the plights of poverty in our country. Premanand, a Gujarati devotional poet, has aptly presented the woes of poverty in the words of Sudama's wife:

*"E Gnan mane gamatu nathi, Rishi rayji re,
Rue balak lavo anna laagu payaji re.
Anna vin bhajan suze nahi, Rishirayji re,
Jive anne aakhu jagat, laagu payaji re."*

Sudama's wife tells her husband in 'Sudama Charitra' 'I've sunk into the ocean of poverty. Premananda belonged to the 17th century (AD. 1649 to 1704).

Some problems puzzle me sometimes. How can such a huge ignorance prevail in a country where the knowledge of Brahma and the upanishada is so much popular? How can we be so lazy where, the Geeta has preached 'Karma yoga' at a high pitch? How can be poverty and slavery be so much stubborn in our country, where the saints, preachers and 'mahatma's have constantly been preaching? Kabir has answers to all these questions.

The saint and the 'mahant' have got mixed, so do the Fakir and the Mulla, 'Saint' and 'Father'. Religion got enslaved in the shrines of brick and lime as a result preaching increased and teaching was forgotten. When blind faith increases thought goes behind the curtain and action becomes superfluous. One talks of celibacy and follows hypocrisy. All these things water poverty. The heads of the muth exploited their male disciples during the day time and their female ones during nights. The people become powerless. Even today also Kabir seems to be relevant, as we have not progressed a bit.

We live in a bizarre world. Kabir says, the world is crazy. If we tell the truth, it attacks us, and if we tell a lie, it accepts the same. Rabindranath Tagore hails Kabir as an advocate of world religion. Gandhiji praises him as a reformer of Hinduism. George Greerson, a famous linguist, considers him as the first Indian to echo Christian thoughts. Some people called him peer, Kabirshah and the Vaishnavas made him Kabirdas. There are two stages of a devotee he is the king of kings due to his inner blissful state and on the other hand he is the slave of slaves before the God. A tattered hut of a saint turns into a king's place when the dweller enjoys his inner happiness. Kabir never cares for anybody except his 'Saheb' (God). How could there be such powerful couplets, without the inner flow of the poet?

*"Masjid Mulla baang pukare,
Kya tera sahib bebra hai?
Chinti ke paav me nepoor baaje,
Tob bhi mera sahib sunta hai."*

What a marvelous image of an ant's leg tied with 'nepoor' (a dancing instrument) being heard by God? When religion turns to be the tool of establishmentarians in the hands of so-called 'purohits' and 'saints', it becomes glowless. Kabir challenged such forces boldly. We can call this 'Kabir revolution; so Kabir becomes a straw in the eyes of the monopoly holders and traders of religion. They framed a conspiracy to blackmail Kabir. A whore was made to enter secretly in Kabir's house at night. Kabir's graceful prestige got nose-dived. The complaint was lodged to the king of Kashi. The court summoned

Kabir. But at the last moment, the whore confessed her role in the conspiracy and Kabir was saved from the ordeal. The arrogant heads of mutt keenly desire for 1008 times, to blackmail the real revolutionaries like Kabir, who challenges their hypocrisies.

A mischievous idea flashes in my mind, when I think of Kabir. Had Kabir revolution been successful in the 15th century and spread in every nook and cranny of our country, the differences and rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims would have melted. Even after five centuries too, the Hindus have not been, free from Mahant, and so does the Muslims from the Mullas. Even today also the rivalry of backwardness continues between these two races. A successful Kabir revolution might have stopped the division of our country. A true religion unites peoples where as non-religion separates them. Kabir challenges us even today how long would you stick to a so-called fake religion, attached to true, neutral religion?

The journey of life throng breath continues effortlessly. If we breathe, but don't think, we cannot reap the harvest of evolution. How could human race survive? George Williams a famous biologist has given a short reply: "You scratch my back and I would scratch yours." Primitive men practiced this mutual help, so they could survive. Religion also should be mutually dependent and human race survives due to religion. But we have not taken religion in its true form.

Let us comprehend Kabir with a real life incident. An export quality 'God' (Saint) had been to America. His satsang was arranged in a town in Road Island. The so-called saint lightly hit his shoe with the head of the devotee bowed before him for blessings. Then the saint had a cough and he caught it in his palm. All the devotees licked it turn by turn. Such a blind reverence was not shown by any poor, ignorant people, but by literate, educated NRIs. The host was my relative, who had narrated this incident to me. After five centuries of Kabir Saheb, we are still unchanged.

Kabir, Dayananda, Vivekananda and Gandhiji have been defeated against our thoughtlessness and rigidity. So Kabir compressed all his agony in a single line:

"Saadho! ye murdonke gaon."

X-Ray

Magahar is a village, somewhat away from Gorakhpur. People in the 15th century said, one who dies in Kashi goes to heaven and one who dies in Magahar becomes a donkey in the next birth. Kabir enjoyed a long life. Puratan Buch writes, Kabir lived for 120 years. In those days aged people avoid going to Magahar and prefer to stay in Kashi to reach to heaven. But Kabirji

did the reverse. He spent his life in Kashi and went to Magahar in his old age and breathed his last there. This was Kabir revolution. According to me Magahar is a pilgrim place for revolution. Kabirji took this step to attack that blind faith. Today also a temple and a mosque have been standing adjoin near his 'Samadhi' in Magahar. There may be many pilgrim-places, but a thought provoking and blind-faith breaking places like Magahar is a pilgrim place in the real sense of the term. One should visit the same at least once.

(Cardiogram' -Abhiyan, May 1996)

Kabir in the New Millenium

Shantilal M. Desai (Mumbai)

We are on the most decisive mode of time at the dawn of the new Millennium. It is not a question of decades, and centuries but the future of humanity in the approaching critical era. Being rooted in the fertile soil of Indian culture and spirituality, we raise our head high and aspire to look into the sky with the advancement of science and technology, information technology and space science, cyberspace, the Internet, websites and what not. Rabindranath Tagore once said that our century is breathing in many centuries simultaneously. Today also we have faster development on one hand and rigidity, poverty, blind faith and many social evils on the other. Not only is this, but the threat to national integration and world solidarity also graver. Despite a common root and cultural-spiritual heritage shared by India and Pakistan, have we not been facing Kargil crisis, international terrorism, Kathmandu-Kandhar plane hijacking drama, splitting forces within and without the country and so on?

What would be the real welcome to the new millennium, then? Shan't we remember Kabir at this moment? Kabir Saheb tried his best to unite and bridge the contemporary conflicting sectarian forces in the 15th century. The religious and social leaders of both the communities regarded Kabirji with reverence, in spite of this bitter criticism to their drawbacks and vices. Do we have such a unanimously accepted preacher these days? The search is disappointing. In that circumstances we need a Kabir renovated. But how can Kabir be renovated? The philosophy, ideology and thinking of Kabir can be revived in the modern context. We should try to adapt to the ideology.

In this issue, let us know what literary critics and other scholars say about Kabir and his life-n-work.

Dr. Prabhakar Machwe's English monograph gives very good account of Kabir's grand life. Kabir lived in the 15th century, when two great religions — namely, Hindu and Islam, were coming to exhibit conflict in that century in India. Kabir attempted to bring both Hindu and Islam closer to each other, by narrating certain practices & beliefs of both as futile. Kabir preached the unique aim and similarities of both religions. Kabir was an uncompromising believer of Ram. According to Kabir, Ram was neither incarnation of Lord Vishnu nor an individual authority. Ram was without attributes or qualities and was formless. Kabir's Ram was in no way different from Rahim or Muslims. His practical message emphasizes hard moral behavior, and he is quite

an opponent of blind faith. His language depicting love and submission of Ram is pleasant (sweet) and serious: but while preaching reforms the language become hard and angry. Nanak and other great Sikh spiritual leaders had great respect for Kabir. He criticized vehemently the caste-system of Hindus. Idol-worship, incarnation, pilgrimage to holy places and earning religious righteousness through river-bath and enjoyment in heaven through such practices are criticized severely by Kabir. Same way, he has criticized certain practices of Muslims such as fasting-for-one-month, habit of clinging to Masjid, offering "Namaj", and "Sunnat", Ajan. Kabir's simple and easy way of narrating his spiritual experiences and their depth, and noble thoughts make his writings really great, and appealing. Even though Kabir appears a die-hard critique of useless religious practices, but at the same time he is not sour in tone. When Kabir is in his form of divine love, the best poetry manifests such as:

(1) *Listen, my brothers,*

One who loves, he alone knows. If you do not have that strong attraction of love towards the beloved, then it is futile to decorate this body, and applying collyrium to the eyes.

Kabir says:

(2) *Serpant of Separation resides in the body, no effective formula for cure, One,*

*Separated from Ram, will not survive, if alive, turns mad.
The intense love for one's dear Lord-Ram is like "Iskebakiki" of suites*

Kabir imbibed traditions of followers of yoga of guru Gorakhnath and disregarded the religious rites & ceremonies and blind-faith, but he did not spare the yogis either. Kabir's opinion was that yogis put unnecessary emphasis on certain practices of yoga of stubborn nature and disregard Bhakti-devotion and divine love for god (Ram). He emphasizes a very easy acceptance of tradition and natural or easy deep meditation

Kabir writes in: 'Vinatina Ang':

I do not close my eyes; do not close my ears,

I do not punish my body.

I see with my eyes wide open, smile

See His beauty all around.

There is one necessary pre-condition for the divine love. And that is, complete annihilation of one's ego. Kabir says:

*Kabir this is house of love, not that of maternal aunt,
Keep one's head off on the ground, he enters the house.*

According to Underhill's statement, sentiment of divine experience of Kabir is basically:

Work-oriented. Mostly he drives the facts to reach to us through signs of motion and speed. For example, "to dance" and "entire world's swinging for long duration in bondage to love", etc, the wonderful and modern picture of imagination, we find in Kabir.

Kabir has influenced the life and literature of Middle Age very significantly. In Hindi Kabir's personality can only be compared with Tulsidas, the great devout-poet of "Sagun" branch.

We should remember Kabir's religious comparison, propagation of brotherhood, social reforms and great scholarly contribution. Without any doubt, lovers of best literature and world-religion will welcome this reading material. i.e., "Kabir" by Prabhakar Machwe, Sahitya Academy, New-Delhi (1994)

Life of Kabir

There is no uniform opinion about life and historical facts of Kabir. There is no uniform opinion even among great literary scholars and followers of Kabir. There are very insignificant personal details in his writings.

Even then, a common biographical picture is sought to be made here from whatever references that could be secured, and on the basis of people's sayings.

There is one direct reference of Jayadev and Namdev as his "Guru", in one of his lines. Jaydev lived in the 12th century and Namdev lived in the 13th century. There is a reference in 'Iana-akabari' which was written in 1596 to the fact that those great pious souls, who are no more alive, Kabir was one of them. On the other side, Moulvi Gulam Sarwar in his 'Khajinat-ul-Aasfiya' mentions 1594 as year of birth of Kabir, which is a mistake. The famous book 'Kabir Charit Sodh' of followers of Kabir mentions 1398 as Kabir's year of birth. Even this year appears not to be correct. The fact, which can be emphatically stated, is that Kabir was alive in 15th century AD.

This fact tallies with common public opinion that Kabir was a contemporary of Sikander Lodi, and perhaps the Kabir has met Sikander Lodi. According to Briggs, Sikander Lodi had arrived in "Kashi" in the year 1494. Archaeology Department of Bharat mentions that Bijalikha had built one building in memory of Kabir and not the monument, and the date mentioned in the report of Archaeology Department is based on mere imagination.

Kabir, as is commonly believed to be disciple of Ramanand, but Dr. Bhandarkar and Mohan Sinha do not believe this as correct. Grierson as mentioned

1298 as year of birth of Ramanand. Farkuhar and Keyi mention this (birth of Ramanand) as between 1400 and 1470. Dr. Govin Trigunayat, after examining all facts, has come to conclude that Kabir was born in 1398. This is as 'Kabir Ki Vichardhara' B-24, second edition Sahitya Niketan, Kanpur.

In this way, after reading contradictory opinions to keep any firm opinion about the year of birth of Kabir will be hazardous.

One Kazi, after opening the book "Kuran-Sharif" selected one word, and that became the name of "Kabir". In Arabic the meaning of the word Kabir is "great". Kabir says:

Kabira your name suggests greatness; your name is Kabir only when you leave your body first, you will get the jewel (Wealth) of "Ram".

Kabir Granthavali (Shyamsunderdas, p.262)

Even regarding the place of birth also, there are three opinions "Maghar", "Kashi" and "Balhara" in Ajamgadh. There is inference in favour of Maghar as Kabir mentions in his writing. Kabir writes: He saw Maghar before he saw Kashi and before his death he returned back to Maghar. Maghar is near Kashi (today's Varansi) and there one monument of Kabir at Maghar, this has been referred to earlier here.

It is a fact that Kabir spent his whole life as a weaver of Kashi. This is how he describes himself. Some other books on Kabir have accepted this popular belief. But there is no other evidence of, Kabir birth in Kashi. There is mention in Benaras gayet that Kabir was born in "Balhara". There is reason for this mention that popular Kabir was born in Lahartara. But there is no exact evidence to support this belief either. There is no monument of Kabir, his sect, or his followers in the district of Ajamgadh.

There are different opinions about parents of Kabir and his community. We let go the stories about Kabir's (appearance) birth due Divine-light, or he was found on a flower of lotus in a pond of Lahartan still there are two possible stories; he was born to a Brahmin-Widow (father is unknown) and she has left the new-born and he was picked up by one couple, of weaving-community, named Neeru and Nima; or he was the child of this couple of Muslim-community. There is only one reference in his poem that his parents were dead, when he was young.

There is inference of three types about Kabir's community. In his writings he tells himself as "weaver" and "Koli". In Varansi majority of weavers are Muslims. In U.P. "Koris" are also weavers, but they are considered of low category. According to Dr. Hajariprasad, Kabir was of "logi" or "fogi" community (Kabir call his father as Gosai). He was a weaver and he had embraced Islam. He was a follower of ascetics of "Nath"-sect who are above cast-considerations. After

establishment of Muslim rule in India, many had accepted Islam, but their old way of life and thinking were the same as before. In support of this, Dr. Dwivedi has given following inference:

Kabir calls himself a "weaver" but nowhere calls himself a "Muslim". When he calls him: Neither Hindus nor Muslim, he mentions the lower community of four communities of Hindu community. Kabir says in one of the poems Jogi Hindu and Muslim are quite different community group.

*Jogi Gorakh Gorakh kare, Hindu Ram NamVade
Musalman kahe aek Khuda hai'
Kabirno Swami Ghat Ghat Samai Rahe.*

(Kabir Granthavali-Sl.330, P.200)

Yogi call-gorakh, Hindu utters the name of the Lord Ram; Muslim says Allah is one; Kabir's Lord resides in all.

It is said that Hindu and Muslim followers and disciples of Kabir started quarrelling among themselves for the last rites of Kabir's body. Hindus wished for the funeral rite and Muslims wished for burial rites. It is said that they removed the covering bed-sheet, only to find a heap of flowers, instead of the dead-body, and they divided the flowers among themselves. It is also said that Kabir had two "Gurus", Ramanand and Shaikh Taki. It is approved by all these tales that Kabir was not born with blind religious beliefs and was not brought-up in such beliefs. He was critical of hard and blind-belief of both religions. He after rising above all limitations and after crossing all borders talks about faith-giving, faithful or supreme element. (Limit, Unlimited both gone and Kabir saw light) so for him there was some support, and therefore he become.... without 'Guru'.

For Kabir's education and tradition, so many imaginations are made.

Everybody knows that Kabir did not receive formal education in any school. He had not received any training in language, Philosophy or in the work of weaving-of-cloth. As per the opinion of Dr. Mohansinha, Kabir uses the word 'Guru' for 'God' (or almighty), as he had no-one guru or pir to initiate (or educate) him in spiritual or other-worldly field, so he was called without guru. Specially his philosophical thinking was the result of his inner-self-knowledge, his spiritual practice mainly was self-acquisition. But Malcom Westcott and Dr. R. S. Tripathi believes that Sheikh Taki was Kabir's 'Guru' (Spiritual-Master). Same thing is mentioned in 'Khajinat-Ul-Aasafia' of gulam sarwar. There is no straight relation in Kabir's poem or other writing, with 'Sufi' culture, but it is evident that 'Sufism' has deep influence on him. Same thing can be said about his relation with 'Ramananda'. Though Kabir tells that his 'Guru' is in Benaras (Kashi). Kabir does not mention the name

of Ramananda directly, but there must have been close relationship between Ramananda and Kabir, as this can be observed from the similarity of language and preaching of both. As per writer-Mohsan Fani of 'Dabistan-E-Tavarikh' and Nabhadass-creator of 'Bhaktimala' and its translator Priyadas, Ramanand was Kabir's 'Guru'-spiritual master.

Kabir's family-life may not be a very happy one. He was a continuous seeker of truth but he had not cut-off worldly ties (altogether) completely. He had a wife and children. He was working to maintain the family. According to some popular belief Loi was his wife; there is no trace of information about her parents. It is still a mystery where and how they got married. Dr. Ramkumar verma has researched kabir's writings and found that Kabir had two wives: one ordinary looking and another beautiful. Second wife was a dancer. Dr. Ramkumar avers from the word 'Ramjaniya' which was used for second-wife, that perhaps she was a dancer. Followers of Kabir do not believe such research and in fact they oppose it.

But all accept the fact that Kabir had one son named Kamal and one daughter named Kamali. It is also said that son kamal and wife loi did not liked Kabir's thoughts of 'Sadhana' and achieving freedom after death through 'Sadhana' (spiritual practice) this is evident from Kabir's writing. Kabir writes some unpleasant words about his wife Kurup, Kujat, Kulakshani Etc. His wife also complains that while she has to go hungry and starve why Kabir is inviting 'Sadhus' and guests for food.

Kabir was by heredity a weaver but his mind was not engrossed in either weaving or in the profession of weavers. He projects many words of the profession of weavers as comparable metaphors such as: a spinning wheel (Charkho), a machine (Sancho-tanavana -chadar).

Even then he was engrossed more in his philosophical thoughts and illusion of Brahman. He was concentrating deeper in god than the customers of his professional work:

*Spinning, weaving, entirely abandoned Kabir,
Hari's name wrote on the body.....*

(Kabir Vangmaya P.172)

Kabir must have traveled on pilgrimage, to many places. He says, in one of his poem "I have gone to Mecca on pilgrimage quite often." But it cannot be said with certainty that this poem (statement) is based on fact or it was an exaggeration, to silence his opponents by such poetical-defensive-exaggeration. In India Kabir certainly traveled to many pilgrim centres, as this is evident from his writings. Acharya Kshitimohan Sen has made a mention of Kabir's visit to Gujarat. In 'Khulasatuttvarikh' there is the story of his visit to 'Ratanpur'. In

Aadi Granth there is the description in one of the verse about his travel to the river 'Gomti' there is mention of religious Muslim whom he tells:

'Pitanbar peer':

*Haj Hamari Gomati Tir,
jyan vase Pitambar peer.*

Kabir Granthavali (Shyamsunder Das, p.330)

In 'Ine-Akabnari' it is written that Kabir had gone to Jagannath Puri and in 'Marathi Lokono Itihas' there is description of visit to the south Maharashtra: reached Pandharpur, in 'Kabir Mansur', which is popular among followers of Kabir, there is description of Kabir's travel to Baghdad, Samarkand, and Bukhara. These historical places are associated with famous Persian Sufis, and therefore it is reasonable to believe that Kabir must have visited these places.

Kabir did not get any honor during his lifetime. He was treated with contempt as he was born in low caste and was ridiculed for the fact Kabir became a preacher. Kabir was also subjected to physical punishment. Some people chained and hand-cuffed him, some even tied both his hands at his back and beat him, this is revealed by some of his writing. This is mentioned in 'Parchai' written by Anantdas. There is one popular belief that sikander Lodi had perpetrated excesses on him. G. H. Westcott in his 'Kabir and Kabir Panth' book has mentioned harassment by both Hindus and Muslims in the following words:

Kabir's utterances of truth and his disrespect for some social practices were reasons for rise of his enemies. According to beliefs of followers of Kabir Sheikh Taki gave expression to the wishes of Muslims. This well-known pir approached Sikander Lodi- the Ruler and put charge of claims made by Kabir of having acquired divine virtues. Pir suggested, sentences of death, for such crime, to the ruler. Ruler ordered sepoy (police) to arrest and bring Kabir and produce him in his presence in the court. The sepoy tried to explain the matter to Kabir and brought him in the court of Sikander Lodi, and this took time and it was evening-time. Kabir stood before Lodi, without speaking a word. Kazi asked loudly Kabir, why is he not saluting the king. Kabir quietly replied: "those who can understand other's suffering are Pir, others are 'Kafirs'"

*Kabira soi pir hai jo jane par peer,
jo par peer na janai so kafir ve peer.*

King asked him why he has come so late in the evening while he had ordered to come in the morning. Kabir said he saw one scene, and he was

engressed in seeing it. King asked him what was that to see which he disrespected his order. Kabir said in reply he saw one procession passing through a hole, which is smaller than one at the end of the needle. King said, 'You are a liar'. Kabir replied, "Oh king, what is the distance between heaven and hell! There are innumerable elephants and camels in the space between the Sun and the Moon, and all these can be seen through the hole, in the eye-ball, which is even smaller than the hole in the needle." On hearing this king was pleased and he set free Kabir.

Conservative extremists Brahmins branded Kabir irreligious and spread rumors about illicit close relationship of Kabir with one woman of bad reputation. So king ordered punishment of death for Kabir. Kabir was tied with a chain and made to sit in a boat. Boat was filled with stones and Kabir was punished to be sunk along with the boat. Boat sank. But Kabir, in the form of a child, came out alive, sitting on the skin of a leopard. Kabir was again arrested and an unsuccessful attempt was made to burn him alive. By now he was termed a magician and a ghost is at his command. So it was ordered that Kabir be crushed to death under the feet of a mad elephant. At this stage a lion appeared in between Kabir and the elephant, and on seeing the lion, elephant ran away. Such stories were circulated about Kabir and some of them appeared in books written by his followers & disciples.

There are four different opinions about the year of death of Kabir. Some say it was 1447, and others 1517. According to Anterdas, Kabir lived for long-life of 120 years. Dharmadas had started a collection of Kabir poems & writings in the life-time of Kabir, and the first collection is of 1463. Babu Dr. Shyamsunderdas believes Kabir died in the year 1517. Sir W. W. Hunter in his 'Indian Empire' (1892), shows Kabir's life time between 1380 to 1420. According to Dr. Hariprasad Shastri this is between 1398 and 1518.

This is just an outline of life of Kabir and it is full of fables. This outline is without any doubt incomplete and unclear specially when we think Kabir's poems and philosophy have for centuries influenced very deeply not only the hindi literature, but also the ordinary life of people and common man's life in North India. There is no doubt that Kabir was the biggest creator & author of poems and philosophical poet in the initial Hindi Literature.

The Bishop of Westcoat, in his first edition on Kabir in 1907, describes him as "the Indian Luther (reformer of religion) of the 15th century." Kabir saheb created spiritual literature and sacred sayings in Hindi. He harmonized the best elements of both the Hindu and the Islamic religions. He bitterly objected the staunch monotheism of the Islam and the idol-worship of the Hindus. At the same time he projected the excellent and traditional sources of the Hinduism. Raja Ram mohan Roy also did the same thing in our century. Kabir tried to launch a harmonized religion (Mustarka falsafa). He erected the edifice of his preachings on the 'Advaitvad' of the upanishadas. He was a great singer, an 'Advaitvadi' and a self-satisfied carefree ascetic."

We find many (shajahain) pen-pictures of Kabir, but none of them is contemporary. It's a strange fact that we do not have any authentic or historic proof in the form of a portrait or a sculpture of any of our great poet or a man of letter, may he belonged to the ancient or the middle ages. May he be Kalidas or Jnaneshwar, Tirlevallur or Namdeva, Chaintanya or Jaydeva no authentic or genuine portrait is available of any of them. So whatever pictures of Kabir we have, the oldest one is safely kept in the British Museum. One of its copies is there in the Indian Museum in Calcutta. In that picture, the weaver poet is seen sitting on his loom, with his trunk open, with a rosary beads around his neck, which the devotees wears even today. He is flanked by two of his disciples one seems to be the Muslim with a musical instrument and the other has worn a necklace. Kabir's face is seen without beard in this picture. There is another ancient portrait of Kabir in the Gurudev Arjundev Gurudwara, in which Kabir is seen sitting on his looms having beard on his face. Kabir is shown as a Sufi saint in the books like 'Kabir-Vachnavali' and 'Ramananda Ramtirtha' and in the portraits at Chaura and Benaras. There is a rosary (Tasbih) of beads in his hands and a mendicant like triangle cap on his head. His ears had been penetrated and had round ear-rings in them as had Nath-cult ascetic. In a very recent picture, published by poona chitrashala press, Kabir is shown as a Hindu monk.. Thus, all these available portraits paint Kabir differently and hence no exact assumption can be reached about his actual appearance, his physique and his dress etc. Perhaps, it would be proper to conclude that Kabir remained formless-as he believed in formless and Nirgun God. His named only remained after him, and not his form.

It would be better to refer, here in brief, the sources from which the material about Kabir's life is available. The first reference is found in the 'Bhaktamal' by Nabhadas (Vikram year 1642). It is believed that this book was written around 1550. 'Bhaktamal' contains the lives and stories of many of the saints. It only tells that Kabir was the disciple of Ramaranda. The criticism by Priyadas substantiates this fact and adds that Kabir was the son of Brahmin widow and was brought up by Niru and Nima. This volume lets the readers know that Kabir was the contemporary of Siquender Lodi. Various verse compositions by Raidas, Garibdas, Dharmadas, Pipa and Tukaram also referred Kabir. The Guru Granth saheb of the Shikh also contains some of his 'Salok' and 'Ragas' Guru Nanak's preachings also quote Kabir. In the 'Parche' of Anantadas probably written in 1600 also substantiates that Kabir was a Kashi-based weaver and a disciple of Ramananda. Kabir was contemporary of Bather king virsinh, and he was a victim of excessive harassment from king Sikander Lodi; he was a saint and he lived for 120 years life.

In some Urdu and Persian books, there is a narration of Kabir's name and stories of events of his life. 'Khajanat-Ul-Asafiya' a book written by Moulvi gulam sarvar has been mentioned earlier. It is written in Mohsin Fani's '

Dabistan-E-Majahib' and in Maulvi Nasiruddin's 'Tajkirul-A-Akabari', that Kabir was an associate of Ramanand. In 'Ien-A- Akabari' there is a difference of opinion about shrine (or 'Makabaro') of Kabir. Some say shrine is in Ratanpur of Avadh Zilla, some say it is in Puri and the author has given his opinion that it is in 'Puri'.

Westcoat, in his book ' 'Kabir and kabir Panth' ' has mentioned eleven different names assumed as 'Kabir' which is written by sadhus & Saints as prefix or suffix after their names. Nagor's 'Kabir Chisti' who died in 1554 in Gujarat; Shekh Kabir Mullah' who was called by Muslims and Hindus called 'Bhagat kabir' who died in 1594. Khwaja Olia Kabir Who visited 'Bukhara' died in 1594; 'Sayad Kabir-Ud-DeenHasan' died in 1490, at Balkh; ' Shekh Kabir' was resident of Bajora and he was an addict of opium, 'Shekh Abdul Kabir' or 'Bala Peer' died in 1539; ' Shekh Kabir ' of Muslims, who went to Balkha, again returned to India and moved along with Kabir, died in 1585 at Fatehpur; 'Amir Kabir Mir Sayad Ali Hamdani' went to kashmir in 1379 and after five years died there; 'Divan Shah Kabir' in whose memory a masjid was built in jaunpur during the rule of Humayun.

First five were mentioned in ' Khajinat-Ul-Aasaifiya', sixth mentioned in: 'Sair-Ul-Aktab seventh mentioned in 'Mukukhul-Ul-Tavarikh' eighth mentioned in 'Akhbar-Ul-Ekhyar'; and the rest (three) mentioned in 'Farista'.

There is not much difference of opinion, among historians and literary critics, about Kabir's outward appearance and his birth-date; but there is a difference of opinion about Kabir's writings & beliefs and his faith. Even then below mentioned opinion is commonly accepted opinion.

Kabir was induced by upnishad's non-dualism and Islam's belief in 'one-god'. But there were some special beliefs as well Kabir's god was like:

*Jene na mukh na mathu, nahi rupak rup,
pusp suvasthi patalo aevo te anup.*

Along with this, Kabir was deeply influenced by devotionism of Vaisnavs. Some of Kabir's poems are such as influenced by Sufi's belief about individual-soul and Almighty god, in some poems Kabir accepts freely words of gorakhnath's followers-who were realized in 'Tantra', and in some poems he is natural. Kabir calls himself unenlightened and uncivilized villager. He proceeds further accepting and absorbing many a currents. In some poems, Kabir, like a simple-minded villager, appears in deep devotional colour. His poems are sung like popular songs. e.g.,

*Divso kem kapva, aeno upaya batavine jajo
Aa par Ganga, peli par Jamuna'
Vachma mari zupadi banavine jajo.*

*palav fadine, kagal banavine jajo.
kabe kabir suno bhai Sadho,
bath zaline rasto dekhadine jajo.*

(Kabir-Hajari Prasad Dwivedi P. 334.)

Kabir made (or depicted) Ramanand's Ram, having form, formless, indescribable, beyond words: In Other Stanza of a poem: Kabir believes god as word (Shabda).

There is no 'ism' to Kabir's spiritualism. Kabir was critical of excitement and fanaticism of both Hindus & Muslims: Kabir was a fearless social reformer.

*Loko aeva bavra, patthar pujava jaay
Gharani ghanti kem na puje, jenu dalyu khay.*

There is intense note of non-attachment in Kabir's thoughts, and in this there is also substance that worldly life and its activities is a river of sorrow (tears) and an ocean of misery (unhappiness). This reminds of the fact that ultimately all things lead to death (destruction). For this reason some critics have found similarity between Buddhism and path of Kabir. Non-existence' a word found in Buddha-philosophy is to be found in Kabir's poems. Some of his poems (Stanzas) appear like translations of Naga-arjun's 'Shunyakarika' e.g.,

*Bhare kabeta babu daru, halko kahunto jutho,
Hun shun janu Ramne, aankhe kadiya na ditho*

Kabir constantly mentions the condition between the said (or spoken) and unsaid (or unspoken) note and silence. Kabir seems accept the enthusiasm of Buddhists and intensity of vajranis.

In some of the poems of Kabir, there is influence of path of Niranjana Kabir employs or experiments the philosophical words and traditional usages of followers of gorakhnath and of Gorakhnaths as well inside the body, mention of eight (Chakras) Lotus (Astakamal) breathing exercise (Pranayam) and other methods of 'Sadhana' are based on philosophy of yoga.

It is controversial (disputed) whether Kabir was a Sufi.

There is another difficulty. Among Kabir's poems which is his genuine one, that also has to be thought of. Some enthusiastic followers have got printed numerous poems in Kabir's name, and so far not a single authentic collection of his poems, which can be regarded as final. So there is difficulty in selecting. All the available printed versions in Hindu, Urdu, Punjabi (in

Gurumukhi script) and English translations are based on oral material, for which no original hand written copy is available. That is why quite a numerous forms of the same poem (creation) are (to be found) available. The printer has published his own faulty version. Religious enthusiasm has been responsible for seeking meaning of faulty prints. To read all these books and commentaries is like finding a path in a jungle. For this book - Four-shyamsunder Das, 'Hariaudh' Ramkumar verma and Hajari Prasad Dwivedi - authors selected poems are considered authentic.

Concluding this note on the life of Kabir, we should remember that however scanty the physical material available about Kabir, we should not stick to superficial data or types of portraits of Kabir etc. Our goal should be to know and learn Kabir's Philosophy as truthfully as we can. It is his work and not the trivial details are significant. His poems, Bhajans and verse compositions are the prime vehicles of his philosophy or ideology. We know Kabir by his verses. But it is not so easy as it seems. It is hard to draw a line of demarkation between his poetry and his ideology. It is difficult to judge from where his poetry ends and mysticism starts. In fact, poetry and ideology have been woven together by a skillful weaver as his looms. Kabir has not written anything deliberately by himself. He simply used to sing and say the things-look within! Observe your ownself...His speech will inspire the generations to come as it had emerged from his own experience and vision. It is here in Kabir that poetry has turned to the level of a Mantra and spells the listeners. It is his lifetime experience that has been percolated in his poems.

KABIR: A Most Uncompromising Saint

Govindbhai B. Bhakta (Editor)

The Bhakti movement, which started in the 14th century, gave great inspiration to the process of Hindu and Muslim cultural synthesis. Kabir was a devout preacher of Bhakti (devotion), and touched the hearts of the masses through his simple poetic expression. This movement was in fact a revolt against religious orthodoxy and fanaticism. Divine love defies all attempts to describe it because one has to experience it in order to know what it is. It can be experienced only when the devotee stills his mind and withdraws his self to the inner spiritual realms. The Guru or Master not only teaches the disciple how to go within; he also enables him to actually do so and taste the nectar of love.

A GURU HOLDS THE KEY TO FINDING THE LORD

Searching for the Lord is no easy matter. Kabir Saheb has said: "That Lord, which even the great Brahma, Suras, Munis, and Gods could not find..."

*Though they became exhausted in the search,
That lord can be found by an ordinary person
Through the grace of a Guru Master.
Therefore, says Kabir, O Brother Seeker,
Do the devotion of Guru
Who is the Lord's incarnation?*

The search for the Lord is a search for spiritual fulfillment, and it requires an understanding of the Purna-Param Brahma (The complete Supreme Being).

In our daily evening aarti- pada we sing:

*Aarti ho dev Shiromani teri
Avigat vigat jugat nahi janu
Kyon pahunche budh meri?
Nirakar nirlep, niranjan
Gun ateet tum deva,
Gyan dhyan se rahat nyara
Kisbidh keje seva?..... I*

Nigam neti Brahmadik kboje
Shesh paar nahi paave
Shankar dhyan dhar nishi basar
Sobhi agam batave2
Sab gaave anumaanse apne
Tum gat likhyona jaaye
Kahet Kabir kripa kari jin par
Jyon hai tyon samajaaye3

[Shiromani Param Brahma Paramatma; Avigat Paramatma: Vigat Par Braham or Narayana Origination of Aunshavatari Atamans like Ram, Krishna etc. Jugat-Brahma or Universe-(1) prathvi Loka (2) Swarga Loka-Sun, Moon, Varuna etc. (3) Swarga Loka- Brahma, Vishnu etc, Shesh-Narayan, Nishi Basar-Night and Day, Nirakar, Nirlap, Niranjan, Nigam- different name of Paramatma]

In this pada, Kabir emphasizes that let us pray to Param Brahma of whom we have neither any information, nor any innate skills to find him. He is beyond our comprehension. He is shapeless, unattached, and perfect and he has no characteristics. How, then do we worship him? He does not respond to meditation, or gyan. Braham and Vishnu tried to find his existence and they are hardly successful. Shankar meditated day and night and could not describe or comment on it.

They learned, through the ages; attempt to describe the Purna-Param Brahma with only marginal success in their own terms and according to their own understanding of the Supreme Being. O Brahma Satya (truth), the human language is incapable and inadequate to describing you in your infinity. With all these difficulties and inadequacies, how can ordinary persons reach and understand the Lord?

Kabir has advised: O "Sadho", it is only one who has achieved the blessing of Guru who will enlighten and explain (within the confines of the human language) the perfect Brahma swaroop.

All of us, therefore, need help to achieve spiritual progress. The helpless infant cannot stand on its feet without the mother's helpful hand; the school boy knows not how to hold the pencil, without the teacher's guidance; to climb a Himalayan one needs a guide who is familiar with the path. How then can be the spiritual journey, involving the conquest of the mind and along with it the passions- the most difficult of all tasks- be entered upon without the help of the competent hands of a perfect master-Guru.

The spiritual path is infested with wild animals and snakes in the shape of greed, lust, anger, hatred, jealousy, all of which become more violent the more they are suppressed. Only a perfect master shows the way to conquer them.

Hence, it is obvious that a spiritual seeker must have a Guru.

Not any Guru will do. Kabir Saheb, in the following couplet, defines the characteristics of a saint Perfect master:

*Nirakar ki aarsi, sadhuhiki deh
Lekha jo chahe aalekhko, inhime lekhi leh*

The reflection of the indescribable is visible on the body of a Saint. If you want to see the invisible, see him in the visible saint.

In the other couplet, Kabir Saheb says:

*When you forget your body and your mind,
And with full love unite yourself with the Lord,
You will meet Him in a moment.
He who is linked with the sat-guru, says Kabir,
Will drink of immortality.*

KABIR, HIMSELF WAS A PERFECT MASTER-GURU AND THE BIJAKS ARE HIS WORDS

Saint siromani (top) sat Guru -A perfect master, such as Kabir Saheb, one who is in intimate tune with the Lord, who initiates his disciples in the word-sakhi (couplet), is our Guru. Through him, and his treasured words, we can achieve spiritual progress and experience the Lord. Kabir reveals the path, with the power and light of which the disciple travels along a spiritual journey. By a steady process, he reveals to us his disciples all the spiritual secrets, unravels all the spiritual truth, and grants all the spiritual understanding and wisdom to us. By the power of the word, Sabda-sakhi he cleanses his disciple of all sins and makes his soul fit to see the Lord- the ultimate truth.

The energy or path to enlightenment took different material shapes and forms found in the universe. The first sound heard at the time of creation is called "Sabda". Sabda was a Guru's word and it is holy word.. Sabda is in the form of God. Of all the terms, Kabir used to refer to the enlightenment experience or the means of reaching it, the most prominent is Sabda, essence of the universe, the word God, along with the name Rama or Ram. In summary, Kabir stressed direct contact with the teacher, indication that the only authentic teaching is the word, the Sabda, sakhi heard from the Guru's mouth.

His disciples collected these words spoken by Kabir over a period of time. A century or two after Kabir saheb nirvan, Kabir panth was formed. His words are preserved in a granth "Bijak" which is their most sacred scripture, Holy Granth. All versions of the Bijak include three main sections, called Ramaini,

shabda, and Sakhi. The best-known translations in the West—Tagore's English translation of one hundred songs, published in 1915, and Robert Bly's new versions adapted from Tagore—are based on verses originally brought together by a Bengali collector who transcribed them from the lips of wandering holy men in the early 1900's.

*The Bijak tells of a treasure,
A treasure that does not show.
The word tells of a creature,
Only rare once knows.*

The Bijak is a holy scripture of Kabir's followers. It reveals a more austere and dramatic personality, a poet of sudden flashes. The Bijak constitute the most authentic works of Kabir. They are written in Eastern U.P. Hindi, for he himself says, "My speech is of the East". It is a dialect of Hindi.

A practice prevailed during Kabir's days of burying gold and silver in some secret place, which was not known to anybody, except the elder of the house. A chart of how to locate this place was made, sealed and handed over to the inheritor of the treasure. Similarly, the chart itself was made of a mysterious language; only spiritual knowledge seekers like Kabir's follower family could unravel this chart. That chart is known as the "Bijak". The Bijak of Kabir is, therefore, a document, which discloses the way to spiritual treasure only to those initiated. 'Bijak' also means essence or inner voice, and Kabir's Bijak is an essence or gateway to Brahma gyana or satya loka.

*Kabir Sahab always addresses his disciples as,
"Kabai Kabira suno bhai Sadho"*

This is his trademark. Kabir's teaching is very personal. This is because he speaks directly and aggressively to listeners, readers and to us. He confronts, irritates, fascinates, and always tries to set off a spark of consciousness in people who are sinking in the river of time, the ocean of delusion.

THE MANTRA IS CENTRAL TO ENLIGHTENMENT

"Ram:nam" mantra uttered by Kabir's Guru Ramanand, when Ramanand stepped down on Kabir. Kabir then claimed that the mantra had been transmitted to him and Ramanand must accept him as a disciple. With the Ram:nam simaran, Kabir says, we can find the path to reach the supreme Lord. Remembering the name of the Lord or simaran, is a mystic devotion in which satguru initiate their disciples. It involves concentration of the name of the Lord as given by sat-guru, keeping out all other thoughts.

*All happiness rests in often repeated simaran;
All sorrow and suffering is removed by simaran;
Practice the simaran and be one with the Lord.
Declares Kabir with utmost force and clarity.*

Here is another couplet in which Kabir says:

*"If by mere celibacy one could realized God,
Then why did not the eunuch do so?
Says Kabir: here ye my brothers
No one can get salvation,
Without remembering his name.*

What ever has grown inside the soul, other than love is a symptom of our imperfection. This imperfection can be removed and entire love is achieved by as simple a practice as the constant repetition of his names in the heart and soul leading toward the understanding of all creation. The Gurus had known the secret to realize this source of all creation. Ram-Nam yoga-mantra is therefore both a psychological discipline as well as physical exercise, which keep body pure, removing all excesses of the bad elements.

*Wake up, my dear, why do thou sleep now?
The night has passed, why waste even the day?
Those who kept vigil secured the pearl of Nam.
Kabir says, only those persons keep awake
Whose heart is pierced by the sound of the word.*

The name reveals its meaning and object to the person, if he is a true seeker, when the name becomes seated in the heart, all worldly-desires disappears.

The devotee, the seeker of param-tatva when menacingly utters the holy name of God, he acquires the connection of that aspect of God, which is signified by the word he is repeating. Hence he attains peace.

This establishes the importance of the Mantra as the key to enlightenment. Kabir made great efforts to convince people of his time not to dissipate their spiritual energies by wrongly focusing on rituals and statues, things outside them. His message was, search for spirituality within you. To this end, Kabir said:

*The creatures are like you, Allah-Ram.
Lord is kind to them.
Why bum that shaven head on the earth?
Why dunk those bones in the water?*

*Parading as a holy man,
 You hide yourself, and slaughter ?
 Why wash your hands and mouth, why chant
 With a heart full of fraud?
 Why bow and how in the mosque and trudge
 To Mecca to see God?
 Twenty-four days for the Hindus,
 Thirty days for the Turks
 A month each year for fasting,
 Eleven for other works.
 Does Khuda lives in the mosque?
 Then who lives everywhere?
 Is Ram in idols and holy ground?
 Have you looked and found him there?
 Hari in the East, Allah in the West
 So you like to dream.
 Search in the heart, in the heart alone:
 There live Ram and Karim
 Which is false, koran or veda?
 False is the darkened view.
 It's one, one in every body
 How did you make it two?
 Every man and woman born,
 They're all you form, says Kabir.
 I'm Ram and Allah's foolish baby,
 He's my guru and pir*

Many have misinterpreted the above verse. From the orthodox religious viewpoint, Kabir was an atheist, with his frank dislike of institutional religion and external observances. But this is not true. It was the socio-religious backgrounds of Kabir's times which compelled him to apply shock methods to awaken the people to the uselessness of blind faith in religions, rites, penance's and observances and fanatic practices in which they satisfy to secure peace of mind in this world and salvation hereafter. In order to arrive at reality and unity, sat-guru Kabir had to lay bare in forceful language, the falsehood of cruel rites and rituals, bogus formalities, ceremonies, religious moles, prevalent among both Hindus and Muslims. He also identified the mantra as the proper alternative to such rituals as a means of achieving enlightenment.

KABIR'S PERSONAL TOUCH AND DEEPER INSIGHT

Within the range of reason, Kabir is a most uncompromising rationalist.

In the intellectual field, he is the most clear brained intellectual. Among the learned, he is the most learned, though he is ignorant of the alphabets.

Although his insight of the Lord as Nirguna Brahm or Param Brahma is impersonal when compared with the avatars of Ram and Krishna, Kabir is the most down to earth of all bhakti poets because he gets very personal with us, the audience.

His understanding of Param Brahma is a vital importance: In the following sakhi, Kabir Saheb explains the saguna and nirguna Brahma.

*Ek Ram Dashrath ghar dolai....I
Ek Ram ghat ghat mai bolai....II
Aakar Dahrath ghar dolai....I
Nirakar ghat ghat mai bolai....II*

*Kabira loha ek hain, gadhane mai hai ferI
Tabika bakhatar bana, tabika shamsheer....II
Jyohi ekai silme, pratime vividh prakar....I
Kahai Kabir tyohi lase, Brahma madhya sansar....II*

In these famous words, Kabir explains that there are no two different objects such as saguna and nirguna. It is a statement of one thing in two different formats. In the form of Param Brahma it is nirguna and in the form of Bhakti, gyan, dhyana, mantra it is saguna. One should not mistake the latter with the former.

God with attributes of God so conceived is called saguna Brahma and God without attributes or more abstract is called nirguna Brahma. Nirguna Brahma is the ocean without wave; Saguna Brahma the same ocean with foaming waves. On the whole, India has been content to encourage the devotee to think of Brahma as either personal or impersonal depending on which carries the most exalted meaning for his particular mindset.

Kabir advised: Create a balance. The outer and the inner should not oppose. They are movement of the same energy; two banks of the same river and the river cannot flow with only one bank. You can forget one of the other, but the other will be there and the river can exist only if the other is there. Life flows between the inner and outer, and both are essential. Life cannot exist with one. And the two are not really two. The two banks of the river only appear two; if you go deep in the river they are joined.

About Nirguna and Saguna Brahma swarup Kabir Saheb says:

*Kabir kuva ek hai, panihari anek
Bartan sab nyare bhaye, pani sabmai ek*

Different people worship their own almighty. They believe in so many religions, sects and panths. They use different means to achieve same goal- ultimately to find param Brahm even though the names of their almighty may be different.

Nirguna and saguna are the forms of Brahma. One seems impersonal other seems personal. One can take form; the other is formless. The same song is just played in different tunes. Let us in prayerful meditation realized what our real nature, through grace and strength supplied by Kabir Saheb, the Lord of our heart.

Note: Instead sometime presenting padas in Hindi, meaning of padas given in this article.

Compiled and references from:

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Saint Kabir

Ishwarbhai P. Bhakta (Bavaji)

Translation: Manohar Patel

*Maala ferat Jug Bhaya; Fira na Manka Fer,
Karaka Manka Caride, Manka Manka Fer.*

O mind, you are doing rosary for decades but you have never stopped wavering. Therefore, stop rolling rosary beads and start rolling beads of the mind.

In the Bible, Jesus Christ says "The Kingdom of God is within you," but we are not able to see it in our inner-self with the physical eyes. This is because mind is covered with the obstructive layers of thoughts and desires. There is only one way to tear these layers and it is called Sad-Vichar (noble thoughts). Therefore, to achieve this goal, the sages invented a tool called the "Jap". It is human nature to think all the time. Just try to visualize a scenario in which you are not able to see an item you had put it at a certain place, because you are in a hurry. The mind thinks, "Where it would be? I am sure I had kept it at this very place"... This thought does not allow you to see that item which is right in front of your eyes. This is a common experience of all of us. When someone shows that item at exactly the same place, we get flabbergasted. This example shows how that layers of thoughts engulf the mind. With the passage of time old thought fade out and new thoughts enter our memory. The reading and listening also generates thoughts in our mind. This is how we carry the countless layers of thoughts in our mind from one birth to another and they obstruct the view of God's Kingdom within ourselves. With "Jap"; these layers can be removed and many people have succeeded. Jap is based on a thought. For example, we recite on Namah Shivay. When this thought, that I bow to Lord Shiva becomes steady in our mind, it removes these layers one by one. With diligent practice, the mind concentrates only on one thought and we experience the positive result of "Jap."

Jap eliminates other thoughts as well as the illusions created by those thoughts. It enables us to experience the divine presence of God in our inner self.

Because of this reason, Lord Shri Krishna tells Arjun that he (Krishna) is the Jap-Yagna of the Yagnas. Meaning thereby Jap is a form of Yagna and through this Yagna we can see the Kingdom of God within our inner self. The

word Yagna implies auspicious deed. The initiation of Jap to see the God; is auspicious deed and that's why it is called Yagna. Kabir Saheb acknowledges the contention of Rishis that Jap purifies the mind. We do not get the benefit of rosary if the mind does not co-operate. We roll the beads one after the other while the mind sways incessantly and as a result; we do not get the desired result of Jap. Our mind must be concentrated on the Jap and Kabir Saheb advises us to practice the mental Jap.

Jap can be written or it can be recited. It is an elementary form of Jap. We should try to reach advanced forms of doing Jap. The second type of Jap is called "Upanshu" Jap. In this form we do not recite, only the lips move. The hand rolls the beads and the lip does the Jap with the active support of the mind. Third form of Jap is called mental Jap. Here the lips do not move; the hand does not roll the beads (but not compulsory), only the mind concentrates on the Jap. The mind has no chance to waver and therefore this is the better form of Jap. If you want to advance in this type of Jap, it is advised that the process of mental Jap should be done in harmony with the breathing process. When these two processes intertwine, it creates a form of "ajapajap". It is the best form of Jap. The mind purification is achieved very quickly if we succeed in reaching the stage of ajapajap. It is the pure mind that helps us immensely in winning the battle of life (Jivan).

Like all Sages and Rishis, Kabir Saheb also emphasizes the importance of mental Jap.

Kabir Saheb says in one of his Shakhis:

*Kabira Jub Paidā Huva, Jug Hase; Hum Roy,
Aisee Kaarni Kar Chalo, Hum Hase, Jug Roy.*

A family rejoices when a child is born, who comes to this world crying. Same way we should devote our life in doing noble deeds, when we die, we leave happily in peace and satisfaction, leaving the family and friends crying.

In this couplet Saint Kabir has presented the reality of life in a poetic form. Birth and death is a routine phenomenon in every household. Everyone loves the life but the thought of the death makes one nervous. This couplet depicts that we can live the life happily without the fear of death. The first line portrays the reality of the life. The second line indicates indirectly that we can bypass this reality of life.

We know the birth and death is not under our control. Birth and death is a sign of a motion. We cannot move from one place to another without a motion. When someone is born, we say the soul has arrived. When someone dies, we say the soul has departed. This is the motion of coming (birth) and going (death), but no one knows from where the soul came and where it did go. That's why the event of birth and death is an extreme mystery.

But the Pious contends that our soul can change this motion of coming into the world and going out of the world. We should consider this opportunity of changing the motion as a golden opportunity available to us in human form of life. It is within the control of the soul to make this motion either pleasant (heaven) or miserable (hell). With noble deeds it becomes pleasant but with bad (tamas) deeds it becomes miserable. This is how the mystery of heaven and hell is concealed in our deeds.

We have to accept the fact that our soul stays in motion even after the death. Almost every religion has presented this theory of heaven and hell in their own ways.

The Hindu saints are highly advanced in their philosophy. With their self-experience, they profess that our soul is capable of stopping the motion of birth and death, it can be stalled permanently and we can even live the life without the fear of the death. This thought is ably explained in the couplet. But it does not explicate the exact manner, in which our actions can liberate the soul from the motion of birth and death. It just hints that we should do our karma DILIGENTLY. But we will get the answer, if, we give a serious thought to this philosophy. I (aham) and my (mam) are the two forces in our minds that prompt us to do our KARMAS. And karma we do by relinquishing these forces can be constructed as done with diligence. This is how our soul can be liberated from this motion.

There is no death, if there is no birth, and that's how this motion stops.

It is everyone's experience that we care not alert/diligent in practicing this philosophy. We do not realize that we have got this human life to rectify the errors we made in the past. As a consequence, we live carelessly. It is but natural that we rejoice at birth, but by the same token, we must live our life in such a way, that this bliss becomes an eternal bliss. We must lead our life diligently and cautiously. The animals enjoy their life, procreate and protect their young. But our life must be distinct and distinguishing from that of the animals, because we are humans. Don't we know that we judge a person by his KARMAS?

Accepting, that a soul goes on doing karmas every moment, we must be focused to master the art of doing KARMAS. Otherwise, whatever KARMAS we do with greed, will become a burden on us and this burden will eventually become a shackle.

It is a Herculean task to overcome the ego, but with due care and whole-hearted efforts, it can be overcome. We are toys in the hands of nature. We are doing nothing; it is the nature that guides us to do our KARMAS. When we will think on these lines, we will be able to expunge our ego.

We neither need any special virtue to lead a vagabond life nor have to go to any school for learning that life style. The ego will be nourished naturally. We do not need anyone's help to practice "eat, drink, and be merry" style. This

is the root cause of the moral bankruptcy that's why arsons is spreading by leaps and bounds. In this context we can now clearly understand what Saint Kabir means to say by "Aisi Kaarni Kar Chalo". When a mobster or a tyrant dies, the people take a sigh of relief; they dance and distribute sweets. But if a noble man dies, not only the relatives but they all grieve.

The reason of grief is, his karma was SAT-KARMAS (noble deeds) and they all had benefited from his SAT-KARMAS. There is no need to over emphasize the fact, that a person becomes great only with his SAT-KARMAS.

In Another Couplet Kabir Saheb Says:

*Karu Babiya Bal Aapni, Chhand Birani Aas,
Juake Aangan Nadi Bahey, so Kas Mare Piyas?*

O soul, do not expect help from others; you have to help yourself. A person living by a river, never stays thirsty.

Kabir Saheb has explained the Karm-Yog in this Saakhi. Karmyog means the ability to pass this tough life successfully with the help of Karm. Shri Krishna has explained this philosophy in detail in the third Adhyay of Gita. We all do some sort of a Karm every second of our life. This is natural. We have to accept the consequences of our Karm. If Karm is good; the result is good. But if Karma is bad, the consequences are bad too. That's why we have to do Karm in such a way that Karm stays a Karm. A Karm does not have any consequences. Shri Krushna teaches this art of doing a Karm in Gita.

As Narshinh Mehta says:

*"Hu Karu Hu Karu Ej Agnyanata,
Shakatno Bhar Jem Shwan Taane!"*

Shakat means a bullock cart. Two oxes pull the load of the cart. A dog walks underneath the cart, which believes he is pulling the entire load of the cart. Any Karm done with this belief has a resultant consequence. The body does the Karm at the command of the mind. The mind has two senses, "Mum" and "Aham". "Aham" means a feeling that "I" do the Karm. "Mum" means "Mine" and the Karm is done with some sort of expectations. We can remove these senses only if we control our mind. Then we will have the dexterity of doing karms as suggested by Shri Krushna. In short so long we do any Karm with these two senses, the Karm has consequences.

Shri Krushna gives Arjuna a master key to solve this problem:

Mayi Sarvani Karmani Sanyasadhtatmachetsa 1
Nirashirnirmamo Bhutva Yudhyasva Vigatjvarah 11

Leave aside all expectations, have a steady mind, leave the consequence of Karm to me and commence the Yudh with out any sorrow.

There are four conditions of doing Karm which will have no consequence (a-karma), which Shri Krushna has laid down in the above shlok.

(1) Do not believe we are doing the Karm, but believe that the atma is responsible for our Karm. We are just a medium of parmatma. Leave all responsibilities of our Karm upon parmatma.

(2) "atmasta Chitt-thi" means the mind is focused on atma-bhav while doing the Karm. If mind is focused on body while doing Karm, it is tainted with elements of "Mum" and "Ahum" which we must avoid at any cost. These two elements will become powerless if we are focused on Atma-Bhav.

(3) No Karm should be done with expectations. That's what is meant by "aasha ne mamta chhodi."

(4) "Shok_hin" (without sorrow) means concerns like what will happen? What will be the consequence? Will they be beneficial or disastrous? Krushna tells us that leave aside all such worries and apprehensions and do your Karm.

The experience of everyone confirms that these four conditions can be fulfilled only if we have a control over the mind. The controlled mind is the essential ingredient of achieving success in Karm-yog. This element is explained poetically in this sakhi by Kabir-Saheb. The first line of the couplet lays down two principles. We cannot rely on others for our advancement. We have to rely on ourselves. The body is full of powerful means. We have five senses, five limbs and on top of them, we have life (pran). The mind is more important than pran, the intelligence is superior to the mind and the atma is superior to the mind.

Atma is full of power without any bounds. In 1893 Vivekanand had proclaimed in the USA that "each soul is potentially divine." What more we want if we posses these divine powers? This makes us ponder that, when atama is so powerful, why we do not experience its power in our day to day life? This can be better explained if we look at the rubber gloves a worker wears while working on a power line. The rubber acts as an insulation and he does not experience the effect of high voltages that passes through the powerline. Same way we have layers and layers of wishes, desires and attachments that act a rubber glove and therefore we do not experience the power of atma. We need to remove this insulation to have this experience.

In a second line Kabir-Saheb has explained the same philosophy by giving an example of a river. The river reflects the stages. It is very small when it is formed, then it becomes very big and ultimately reaches the destination I.E. the ocean. The yogi must have these characteristics. To have a vision of almighty should be the aim of life. The one who works tirelessly to achieve this aim is called a Karm-yogi.

Just as a river overcomes all obstacles, a Karm-yogi has to overcome political, social and financial obstacles. He has control over his mind, so temptations do not deviate him from his path. He does not rely on the help of others to solve his problems. He does not live in a false hope that some one will come to help him in solving his problems. He relies on his effort and achieves success in his mission. The most important characteristic of a Karm-yogi is, he does not like stagnation. He loves lively life. He changes according to changing situations and circumstances. He makes a new path as and when a necessity arises, he is determined and focused on achieving his goal.

There is a close similarity between Kabirvani and Shri Krushnavani. Both vannis flow from the same spiritual heights for the welfare of mankind. Both are the result of self-experienced.

(Courtesy: Kabir vani '99. Every effort is made so as not to dilute the Gujarati script. There should not be, but in case there is a difference between the two scripts, the Gujarati script should be taken as authentic. Manohar Patel)

The Relevance of Kabir Literature

Compiled by: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

The human psyche has been influenced since ages by the ideologies of some great thinkers and saints who have been born on earth from time to time. Saint Kabir belongs to such a breed. A bird's eye-view on Kabir Literature reveals that his creations were the result and reflection of the contemporary 14th century situations. Kabir's bhajans, songs and couplets, not only guided his society but they are even relevant and capable to illuminate our understanding of the present society and its people. His preaching is powerful enough to solve various socio-political, religious and cultural problems. Some of our burning issues also could be solved if we apply Kabirji's knowledge and guidance. Thus, Kabirji is not the saint of the past, but of the present as well.

Any creative writer always represents his contemporary socio-cultural environment; at the same time his literature over comes the spirit of time also. This means, his thoughts and vision could be a source of guidance not only to his own time, but also to the times to come. There lies its relevance. A poet not only creates for his own pleasure but he is concerned with the well-being and good of the entire human race. He is the voice of the humanity. If saint Kabir is evaluated from this angle, it could be seen that he has not only illuminated the lives of people with the radiance of devotion (Bhakti), but also he has sanctified the psyche of the people. This, according to me, carries great value and significance rather than being a singing bird only. We, the teachers of Literature look at the creations of Kabirji from this literally point of view.

Prior to ponder over the relevance of Kabir literature, it must be stressed whether Kabir literature is meaningful and fruitful in the present situation? If the present reference can testify it, then it can be called relevant. Does Kabir literature carry the capability to affect and convert the public-psyche? Such are the issues that some of us have to discuss before we discuss his literature.

Kabirji had not composed any of his song or couplet considering the literary value or quality of poetics in mind. His prime spirit inspired him not to create for literature, but to keep the socio-religious condition of his time in his mind. He was to reflect and react to his social conditions and expected a radical change in the conflicting and complex issues.

Kabirji is well known in Hindi literature, as a social, cultural and religious reformer in its Nirguna tradition of Bhakti-era. He proved his worth, even

though being an illiterate person as the most philosophical and devotional poet, who inspired a perpetual stream of Bhakti among the people in the most tough and difficult time. He said:

*masi kagad chuyo nahi,
kalam gahi nahi bath*

Even though he cleverly guided the society Kabirji says "I never touched a paper and never held a pen in my hand." Kabirji was a great philosopher. Literally poetry was not his aim; however, he supplied a substantial stuff for students of literature too. He was a Guru in the field of Sadhna, and a visionary in the field of literature.

One of the two sided of his personality was that of a preacher or religious reformer; and the other was that of a dedicated Bhakta-devotee. His aim has to propagate his religious vision among the conflicting and quarreling fractions of society. He wrote against blind-faith, superstitions and religious orthodoxy. Very symbolically. Sometimes, it is criticized that Kabir used very rough and harsh language to hit his target, but the very style and diction conferred a truth-finding vision to society. It was not easy, otherwise, to break the orthodox and traditional thinking of the people. In view of Dr. Sarnamsinh Sharma:

"Kabir wrote on an insulting and offensive way against social evils with a view to destroy them, and to set each man free of them. He even abused some social and religious maladies. As a result, his language seems to be harsh and tough."

Though Kabirji was illiterate, he had acquired knowledge by "Satsang" and extensive traveling. He came in contact with different sorts of people at different places, and gathered a first hand experience of life lived by people around. As a result, his language got enriched with various rustic expressions and symbols, which could make their miche in the reader or listener's hearts. It could create a desired effect.

Kabirji's relevance would prove his greatness. He was a carefree wanderer and a happy go lucky sort of person. He was stuffed with an inborn revolt, with which he revolted against social and religious disorders. There is a torrent of lava expressed in his couplets. So he was disliked and opposed by his contemporary Pundits, Maulvis, and social-religious so-called leaders. They were furious as Kabirji was truthful and a visionary.

The entire society vibrated with Kabirji's language. It awakened a common man among the contemporary social-political scene. He advocated the path of prayer of Nirakar Brahma and preached to have a self-realization of shapeless God within the being. He inspired the people to remove the darkness

of ignorance by the light of Atmajnan, the knowledge of the self. He said to search for the supreme-soul within us.

*kasturi kundal basai, mruga dhundhe van mabi I
ase ghat ghat rama hai, duniya dekhe nabi II*

Kabir believes the Supreme-Lord reins and dwells within our heart, but we fail to identify Him due to illusion or Maya. The love divine will lead us inward. The readers of the Veda, Purana, Upanishada would be not able to decipher God's grace as their knowledge is bookish, but he who understands true love of God is a great person, he says:

*Pothi padhi padhi jug muaa, bhaya na paundit koe I
adhai akhsar premaka padhe so pandit hoe II*

Being the saint of a high order, Kabirji preached monotheism. There is no difference between Ishvar-Allah, Ram-Rahim. He abolished the age-old religious beliefs and criticized rituals and rites. He wanted to establish new values of life, so he protested against the idol-worship, and abused the superficial rituals practiced by the Hindus and the Muslims. He was not against any religion, but he could not accept the deceit and blind faith in any of them. He sarcastically laughed at the idol-worship saying:

*pathen pujai mile to mai punju pahaar I
tatia ye chakki bhali pis khaye sansaar II*

He also laughed at the visitors of the temples and mosques and also made the worship by Hindus his aim or irony.

*puja, seva, niyam, vrat gudian ka sa khel I
jab lag pid parasai nahi, tab lag sansay bhel II*

On the other hand he criticizes Namaj of the Muslims:

*kaankar paathar jorikai masjid lae banaya I
tapar mulla bang de, bahira huua khudai?*

Kabir favored no religion, so both the Hindus and the Muslims followed without racial or caste discrimination. He preached that God cannot be attained by going to temples or mosques, but could be realized by developing godly qualities within. He convincingly argued that the blood runs into the veins of all the people is similarly red, there is no discrimination of religion.

Then why, as human beings, should we quarrel among ourselves in the name of religion? Kabir, thus, propagated the inherent unity of mankind, and preached a simple and affectionate life for all. We do not know the true meaning of religion and parish among ourselves.

*hindu kabai mohi rama piyara, musalmana rahimana
aapasamen dou lari muai, maram kabu na jana I*

He emphasized the purity of action-there must be no difference between one's words and actions. The cleanliness and sanctity of mind & body itself is a great pilgrimage. If our mind is full of impious thoughts and complexities of intrigues it would not help our going to pilgrim places. First of all purity of mind and body is essential.

man mathura, dil dwarka, kaya kashi jan I

He preached to control the mind by curbing the senses. If mind is out of control, what benefit are we going to get if we pray with the help of 'mala' in our hands?

*mala ferat din gaya, gaya na man ka fer I
karka manka chhandike, manaka manaka fer II*

Kabirji also thought about the weaker sections- the down trodden of the society. He resists of the authoritative forces but did leave the battle. He proved himself an able social reformer also. The caste and class discrimination were at its peals, and the social harmony was dwindling in his time. A strong conflict between the Hindus and the Muslim was the reality of society. Kabir opposed the class-system of the Hindus. No human being is higher or lower in his eyes. He says:

*jo tu brahaman, brahmani jaya
aan bat havai knyoo nabi aaya ?
jati- paati puchai nabi koya,
harikao majai so harika hoye I
jatan puche saduki puch lijia jnyana I
mol karo talavarki padi rahan do myan II*

Kabirji taught a wide-ranging religion of humanitarianism, transcendent all boundaries of castes and creeds, So followers of various sects and sections of religious joined his trend. He made them realize the noble truth of life. He established a common principle of love for everybody. The well-being and happiness of all human being is his aim. He aimed at its spread.

Kabir reacted against the contemporary social situations. The authoritative religious leaders used to terrorize people in the name of religion. Common man was tense and troubled by such greedy and corrupt leaders. Kabirji tried to organize people and reiterated humanitarian religion. He launched the slogan of 'Service to humanity is service to God,' today also; this is very relevant and necessary to act upon. Dr. Rajdevsinh rightly remarks:

"Kabirji considered human values equal to godly qualities. Where ever he found kindness, philanthropy, he considers such person Ram's incarnation, or representative."

Thus, he gave godly stature to a person who posses godly virtues. We know that each epoch generates and 'avatar' to solve the contemporary problems. Kabirji was also undoubtedly such an 'avatar' who performed a tremendous task of elevating religion to spirituality both of the Hindus and the Muslims. Religious rigidity, exploitation, unethical practices, corruption enmity between religious etc. are the contemporary problems of our time. Kabirji preaching is also very useful to understand the germination of these issues and to find out their solutions. Today a common man has lost his real identify- he is identified by his caste, creed, cult, religion, color, and class etc. Kabirji rose above all these and tried to elevate people accordingly. He said, religion never plays a dividing role amidst people, but it must be a unifying force. Religion is an ideal duty, but today it does not seem so. On the contrary, terrorism and extremist activities spread fear and violence in society. It disrupts social coherence. Kabirji unveiled the so-called religious leaders and exposed their greed, vested interests and malice. Such a reformer is badly required these days. He emphasized mutual love and harmony, sympathy and honor among people.

Kabirji could be called a true leader of the mass. He was a visionary. He preferred to be the Messiah of the poor and the exploited even by facing strong oppose of the aristocratic class of society. He was a saint with superb self-confidence with which he moved in the direction of social-religious service. He could find out the truth by unearthing the controversial theorizes, and established internal brotherhood, love and faith among people at large. He could very well bring a revolution in thought of the people.

Contemporary time of ours is no less different than that of Kabirji's. Today also political authorities do interfere to social-religious scene and try to take political advantage of the religious faith of the people. They even seek shelter to conspiracies and intrigues to achieve their goals. They don't wish that people lived peacefully, so they don't allow public-consciousness to grow. Racial discriminations, communal riots and religious conflicts are the issues they want to keep burning. Religious modes are used as mean to achieve this target. They don't wish that people, poor, common mass should come out of blind faith and illiteracy. Humanity has been suffering from deterioration. Hatred, jealousy, ego conflict and violence are seen all around. At such a

juncture, Kabirji's literature, which had flown from the spiritual heights, could be of great guidance.

We have been breathing in an age of materialism, industrialization and mechanization. This has hampered the human values a great deal, which requires restoration in our society. Human being need not be discarded, but his self-respect should re-establish or revived.

*sai etana dije jaame kutumb samay I
mai bhi bhukha na rahun, sadhu na bhukha jaay II*

Ultimately how much progress does a man want in the name of material prosperity? Such a progress has got no value where he himself is entangled by greed, jealousy and unethical ways. He should put an end somewhere to his greed.

Social integration and organization has gone to the devils these days. So the system with which we have been associated, needs to be value-based. Kabirji has attacked the system based on vices, immorality and tyranny. He advocated freedom of thought for human races to develop. C.E.M. Joad, in his "Essay on Civilization" says;

"We need three things to be civilized. One is freedom of thought, second, Safety, and third, Society."

The Messengers of Love

Prof. Riyaz Punjabi

The interaction of Arab Muslims with India as traders and merchants had started well before the 8th century AD. However, their regular inflow started with the establishment of Muslim rule in Sindh and Multan in the 8th century. It started a process of their settlement on the Indian soil, and soon they made the seashore, stretching from Sindh to Kathiawar and Gujarat up to Malabar, their abode. It thus signaled the first close intermingling of Hindu and Islamic civilizations. A large number of Arabic words found in Gujarati and the Dravidian languages are testimony to this very interaction.

The Ghaznavides occupied Punjab and Multan in the 11th century AD, and by the 13th century AD, Muslim rule in Delhi, known as Delhi sultanate, was established.

Obviously, most of the Muslim rulers, who came from Central Asia and settled down in India, did not come with their armies and armories alone. Apart from the people belonging to different walks of life, they brought with them their cultural patterns, traditions, customs, and languages as well. Gradually, these cultural patterns, traditions and languages got juxtaposed on the cultural milieu, adding a new color to the mosaic of Indian culture.

The Bhakti movement, which started in the 14th century, gave a great fillip to the process of Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis. The Bhakti movement not only demolished the iron walls of the Hindu caste system- and affected men and women equally- it even brought under its spell the Muslims of the country. Ramanand, who was the chief proponent of this cult, and his disciples, used verses as a medium to reach the people. Notable among them were Tulsi Das and Kabir, a Muslim weaver. He became a devout preacher of Bhakti, and touched the hearts of the masses through his simple poetic expressions. His devotion and selflessness attracted many a Muslim to his creed. This movement was in fact a revolt against religious orthodoxy and fanaticism.

Same Spring

Kabir strived to prove that the spiritual streams of Hinduism and Islam emanated from one and the same spring. This theme became central to the messages of Sufi saints and other Muslim scholars much later. The Bhakti movement gave a message of human equality, which cut across barriers of caste,

color, creed, language and religion. A large number of Hindus and Muslims became followers of Kabir, whose name became synonymous with Bhakti. Kabir Panthis (the followers of the path laid down by Kabir) are found throughout the country even today. Kabir and his followers were the first messengers of love and brotherhood in India.

During this period, another great messenger of love and brotherhood, Guru Nank (15th century AD) appeared on the social scene of India. He learned Sanskrit and Persian from Hindu and Muslim teachers. In the true tradition of Kabir, he, too, was opposed to mundane traditions, religious rituals and customs. His concept of God is akin to the Islamic monotheistic concept of Allah. Guru Nanak was also opposed to caste, which according to him created barriers between human beings. He believed in the Hindu concept of transmigration of soul. His ideas were also disseminated in the form of verse. His poetry has abundance of Arabic and Persian words, which is preserved in the form of Guru Granth Sahib- the sacred book of the Sikhs.

In Maharashtra the Bhakti movement, led by Nam Dev, had started in the 14th century AD, much before Ramanand started his Bhakti movement.

By the 16th century this message of love had reached Bengal, and many saints and seers, revered both by Hindus as well as Muslims, had started galvanizing the society. This movement gave rise to many sects, which were led by different seers. Satya Pir led one of the popular sects, comprising both Hindus and Muslims, was led by Satya Pir.

The cult of Krishna Bhakti, led by Chaitanya in the 16th century, became very popular with the masses. This cult, too, was opposed to orthodoxy, religious dogmatism and ritualism. He laid great emphasis on love and devotion as means to realize God. He adopted music and dances as a medium to communicate his ideas to the people, and had a large Muslim following.

Spiritual Unity

It is quite evident that the main aim of all these cults and movements was to bring about a spiritual unity among the people of various faiths living in the Indian sub continental. It aimed at bridging the cleavages sought to be created by the orthodox and fanatic religious zealots in the society.

The Muslim saints and seers who made India their adobe talked in the idiom of the masses, used their religious metaphors and expressed themselves in the prevalent literary expressions to spread their messages of spirituality. Among the two prominent Sufi orders in India, namely Chishtia and Suhrawardia, the former became very popular because it attempted to be closer to the masses culturally, emotionally and psychologically.

The saints of this order identified themselves with the common and down-trodden masses rather than the kings and rulers of their times. Their khankahas

(Hospices) were not situated in the capital cities alone, but were established in remote villages and small towns in the countryside. These Khankahas became the centers of spiritual and emotional solace for the common people.

The saints of Chishtia order sent their disciples to different parts of India from Bengal to Kashmir. This gave them an opportunity to learn different languages, dialects, cultures, traditions, and customs of the people.

The Chishtia saints communicated with the people in their own languages and dialects and used the indigenous symbols to disseminate their ideas. Expressions like *Holi*, *Krisna Raas*, *Bansuri*, and *Leela* are still being used in *Qawwalis* sung in *Khankahas* and tombs of these saints and seers.

Hindvi

They described the Indian mode of expression, which Muslim saints of foreign origin used as a means of communication, was *Hindvi*. In the later period, with the close interaction of Arabic and Persian languages, *Hindvi* assumed the form of Urdu language. These saints used *Hindvi* poetry, its metaphors and symbols, as a means to communicate their ideas and philosophy. This method initiated the process of cultural and linguistic assimilation.

The agglomeration of Sanskrit, Hindi, Punjabi, Arabic, and Persian words manifested in the form of Urdu, a living example of cultural synthesis, which took place at the time. According to Syed Ahmed Dehlvi, the author of the *Fahang-I-Asfiya*, there are about five-and-half lakh words in the Urdu vocabulary, out of which three-fourths have Sanskrit origin.

Sheikh Foundation Masood Ganjshakar, popularly known as Baba Farid, was the first Muslim Sufi saint to have used Punjabi and other *Hindvi* idioms and expressions to popularize his ideas. His poetry became so popular that it found a place in *Guru Granth Sahib*.

It is interesting to note that much of Baba Farid's Persian poetry has been cast into oblivion due to the passage of time. On the other hand, his Punjabi poetry, which is preserved in the folk form, has survived the vicissitudes of time and is very popular even today after hundred of years.

Scholars, spirituals and men of vision carried the traditions of Sufi saints and seers forward. Dara Shikoh made the greatest contribution on this behalf, son of the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. In the beginning, his spiritual quest was confined to Sufism; however, his perceptions underwent a sea change after his research in Vedantic philosophy. His research resulted in his scholarly work, *Mujm-ul-Bahrin*, which was translated in Sanskrit as *Samudra Sangam*. This compendium in the collection of articles on Islamic mysticism, Hindu yogic practices and doctrines, Dara Shikoh labored to prove that there was no difference between Islamic Tassawuf and Hindu yogic practices and beliefs. It

was for the publication of Mujim-ul-bahrin that Darah Shikoh, was declared and apostate and sentenced to death by fanatic Muslim theologians.

Darah Shikoh also translated the Vedas and ideas of Hindu monotheism into Persian language.

The close interaction among the Muslim sufis, Hindu yogis, scholars and the common masses from the 15th century onwards resulted in the emergence of a composite culture. It held the society under its full sweep. And in the 20th century, Nazir Akbarabadi symbolized the tradition of India's composite culture by using indigenous symbols and metaphors in his poetry. Even prominent Urdu poets and writers from India and Pakistan have been frequently using Indian folk symbols and expressions. The message of the Sufi saints has not been lost on them.

Courtesy: Prof. Riyaz Punjabi, "Religion," India West, January 8, 1993. P: 46, 47.

Nine Gems of Kabir

Saint Shree Vinoba Bhawe
Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

A lady asked Vinobaji the meaning of one of the bhajans of Kabir. Very modestly, he felt that he hadn't studied Kabir in greater detail as he did Tulsidas and Nanak. He had, of course, thought of the bhajans and Duha of Kabirji. He had prefaced a book by viyogi hariji in which he had compiled the sayings of nirgun panthi saints of Hindi like Kabir and Nanak. At that juncture, Vinoba had summarized the gist of Kabirji's preaching.

"Bijak" in one of the famous works by Kabir, He had read it at the age of 23, and found it to be the reflection of "Anubhavamrut" (or Amrutanubhave) by Marathi saint Jnaneshwar Maharaj. It was his impression that it was the combination of Nirgun and Sahaj terms of thinking Kabirji was not learned or literate man. Kabiraji must have dictated his bhajans or sayings to some writer. Some of his very fine bhajans have been compiled in "Ashram bhajanavali: Vinobaji had very fondly recited them. There have been many critical books on Kabir. He also read "Kabir- Dohavali", "Kabir-Gitavali". But he had given to pen some of his reflections today on Kabir and his philosophy revealed in his bhajans. Each of his bhajan is like a live wire full of highest philosophical and spiritual potential. Here they are:

1.

"Guru gud diya mitha"

Guru, the spiritual master, gave the sweet jaggery...

Sugar is harmful to health. It is also called "White-poison". But Gud or jaggery is better than sugar. It is very sweet as well.

*"Guru gud diya mitha,
Kahe Kabir mein pura paya...."*

How was the experience of tasting gud? He says:

"Ab ghat Sahib ditha."

Gud eating is such a sweetening experience that he could feel the presence of God in his body. God is everywhere-Omni present.

*"Khalak me Khalik,
Khalik me Khalk."*

"Khalak" means nature of God's creation. It means there is God in his creation.

"God is in nature, and nature is in God,

"Sab ghat rahya samai"

God is present in all the bodies. Guru gives such a preaching to me and I accepted it. It was like gud (jaggery) and I happily ate it.

'The guru gave gud' in the anecdote by Shankaracharys, who says there are three types of visions:

"Gud is sweet." It is heard, neither seen nor tasted.

"Guru suggested and show that gud is sweet." So I only saw the jaggery, but not tasted it.

"Sweetness of gud is tasted." So this third vision is the acme of the story. It has given us the real experiences. The first vision here is only the "heard knowledge." Means reading the vedas, Scriptures, listening to the Guru, the satsang, etc are heard knowledge. It is the conception of the scriptures. "What is the form of God?" As described in the vedas. One gets knowledge by reading scriptures. Then comes the guru or Maharaj. He saw the gud. He gave the glimpse of God, and the guru disappeared. This second stage is the conception of God given by Guru. But then, at the last stage, when I myself ate gud, it was my personal experience. This is self-realization.

These three types of realizations are suggested by Shankaracharya. Kabirji has also concentrated on them very minutely:

*"Guru gud diya mitha,
Kabe Kabir Mein pura paya
Ab ghat sahib ditha."*

2.

*Zini Zini bini chadariya
So Chadar sur nar muni odhi,
Odhike maili kini chadariya
Das Kabir jatanse odhi
Jyonki tyon dhar dini chadariya.*

Kabir was a weaver saint. He practiced weaving, but simultaneously, he thinks at its process philosophically. He symbolizes this human body occupied by soul as a bed sheet. The Gods, and humorous human beings have utilized the human body (bed sheet). But what did Kabirji do? He maintained the cleanliness and sanctity of the body (sheet) and surrendered it as it was given to him. It was not stained nor torn. Do we keep our sheet clean and sacred, holy and pious? Kabirji kept his child like innocence and curiosity for God, intact. This is his great achievement.

3.

*Pani badho navmain
Ghermein badho dam,
Dono hat ulechiye
Yahi sayano kaam.*

I have lectured extensively on this theme — Bhudan-Gramdan movement rests on this principle of charity and humanitarianism. I preached people to donate land and property whole-heartedly-Yahi Sayano kaam-this is the wisest work to do. I said to mammoth gathering during my Bhudan movement.

4.

*Sahaj samadhi bhali re sadho
Sahaj smadhi bhali
Aankh na mundo, kaan na rundho,
Khule naina pahichano
Hansi hansi sunder rup nibaro.*

How nice it is to see the beauty of God, with our eyes open. See the beauty of a flower or a bird; watch the majesty of rainbow or the rainfall;

*Observe the rising or setting sun.
How fine the trees and nests are!
"Khule naina pahichano!"*

See every thing with open eyes, means with open mind and open thinking. You need not close your eyes or block your ears to meditate. Whatever is seen in the nature or in the universe is "Bhagvatswaroop" it is in the form of God. Try to contemplate with this sense, and then your meditation and attainment of God's grace would be easy.

5.

Ghat ghat mein vah sai ramta,

*Katuk vachan mat bol re
Tobe Ram piya milenge.*

It is not enough not to speak harsh words; but one should not hurt somebody's heart, thinking him to be the creation of God.

"Ghat ghat mein sai ramta,"

The same God also dwells within him. So, how can I hurt his feelings? Otherwise politicians also preach to speak sweet words only, as they themselves do. On the table of talk they utter goody words, and on the battle they sharpen their swords. So it is not enough to speak sweet words, but speak with the sense of God's presence in the listener.

6.

*Jo ghar funke apana,
Chalo hamare saath.*

Here is the sixth Gem, suggested by Kabir Saheb. If you want to accompany us you cannot keep your parents and domestic affairs intact. You can't ride on many horses. Leave everything and come to the path of Bhakti.

7.

*Sajan ke ghar jana hoga,
Mitti odhavan, mitti bichhavan,
Mitti main mil jana hoga.*

How nice is this seventh gem! We want to go to see the Lord, God! What should we do for that? Adore your self completely, as God is your beloved. You have to be one day, to put on soil, to sleep on the soil, to be in the bed of soil, means one should die for the sake of God's "darshan". So rejoice the dearth. Go placidly, pleasantly, unhesitatingly.

8.

*Kabe kabir Suno mere guniya,
Aap mue piche dub gai duniya.*

Here is a sense of detachment. At the time of death the noise of "ghar...r...r" come from our throat, that is the last breath. In Hindi "ghar" means home. We don't want to leave 'ghar' at the last moment. So develop a sense of detachment.

9.

*Karo kagaz kali syahi,
Likhat padbat vake padhaya de
Tu to Ram Sumir Jag ladava de.*

I am fond of singing this bhajan, but a devotee asked me to make him listen this bhajan after his education is over. As I read thousands of books, write number of volumes and now I recite this bhajan happily, so people say let us get rid of everything, our duties and responsibilities and then we shall pay heed to this bhajan.

Meaning behind this bhajan is that Kabir was illiterate. He lived for 120 years and presented his body, as it was, stainless, to the feet of the supreme soul.

These are the nine gems, which Vinobaji has chosen from the writing of Kabir Sahab.

Courtesy: Adopted from 'Bhumi Putra'

The Esoteric in Sant Kabir Das

Prof. Dr. Parvin D. Syal, M.D.

Humble Beginnings

Sant Kabir Das, born in 1440 near the holy city of Kashi, on the banks of the Ganga, is considered the foremost saint of North India. Though details of his birth are scant, legend has it that he was the abandoned son of a Brahmin widow, brought up by a Muslim couple, Niru and his wife Nima. Shortly before his birth, Amir Tamur the Cruel, also known as Tamberlane, invaded India and decimated the country's population and its wealth. The ruling Slave Dynasty in Delhi had already extended its hold over the holy city of Varanasi, and there was further degeneration in the moral fabric of society. It was perhaps ironic, in Nature's great game plan that Kabir was brought up by a humble family of "julahas" (weavers,) and he not only wove cloth for himself, but applied his skill in weaving, for all humanity, a cloth of dignity, self realization and righteousness studded with the rhinestones of truth. Sant Kabir became a Ram Bhakta, and found solace and inspiration in the name of Ram. Legend has it that in the pre-dawn hours, Kabir would stretch himself on the steps of the bathing ghat that led to the sacred river Ganga, in Kashi. Sant Ramanand, who bathed there every morning, once unwittingly stepped on the body of the prostrate Kabir, and uttered "Ram, Ram." This became the sacred mantra for Kabir, and he became a disciple of Ramanand.

Kabir shunned religious tags throughout his life. He was well versed in Vedanta, Vaisnavism, Nath Sampradaya, Sufism, and mainstream Islamic and Hindu beliefs of that time, and his writings reflect knowledge gleaned from multiple sources. Sant Kabir was a unique synthesis of a yogi, a guru, a poet and singer and a social reformer.

Bhakti Yoga

The religious and social philosophy of Kabir is expressed through his "Shabads, Ramainis, Kaharvaas and Dohas." Kabir realized that the purveyors of religion at the time, the Muslim Mullahs and the Hindu Pandits, used their exclusive knowledge of Arabic and Sanskrit respectively to keep the true meaning of religion from the masses, and exploited the illiterate by assuming temporal powers and significance through self-serving ritualistic practices of

religion. Kabir spoke in the common language that all understood. Though his words are simplistic in nature, their meanings are cryptic and have an esoteric core.

It was believed at that time that spiritual knowledge- "Gyan"- could only be garnered through years of meditation in the forest. Though many learned Sadhus did indeed attain spiritual salvation and realization through "Tapasya" rigorous meditation and self denial- Kabir demonstrated that the same could be attained during the householder phase of one's life. Like the other great saint of India, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, and like the great "Bhakti Yogini," Meerabhai, Kabir was a Bhakti Yogi. He obtained the name of Ram as his mantra from his Guru, and uttered it in his quest for the Supreme Truth- the one he called "Sat Purush."

Search Inwards

To understand oneself was to understand the Universal Soul (Param Atman). This is what Kabir believed. This is what Kabir practiced. This is what was reflected in his dohas, examples of which follow, in transliteration and with a paraphrased translation: -

*"Kasturi kundal basey, mrig doondey vanmaahi.
Aise ghut mey peev hai, duniyaan jaaney naahin.*

"The musk deer, attracted by its own scent, wanders the forest in its search, little realizing that its body is the source of the fragrance. Similarly, the average man of the world wanders through life subconsciously seeking the Absolute Truth, the Beloved "peev." The mind-body complex of man is the source of this Beloved, but he seeks not within."

*"Jaise til mey tel hai, jyon chakamaka mey aag
Tera saainy tujh mey basey, tu jaag sakey tho jaag.*

"The Lord of our self is within each of us. It is a truth that is as intrinsic as the oil in the sesame seed. It is glorious and evident even if it seems distant like the fire in the lightening. It is up to each one of us to wake up to this truth within us."

Neither Hindu Nor Musalmaan But The Five Elements

Kabir realized that organized religion, under the grips of the priest, was misguiding the populace towards blind faith and superstition. He shunned hypocrisy in society and the practice of meaningless ritual. He did not identify

himself as Hindu or Musalmaan, as mentioned in the doha below: -

*Hindu kaben tho mai naheen, musalmaan bhi naabin.
Paanch tatva kaa pootalaa, garvi kheley maabin.*

“I am neither Hindu nor Musalmaan. The mind-body complex, composed of the five elements, is classified as belonging to a particular faith, when fact it is like the puppet’s dance that will end someday.”

Esoterically, Kabir subscribed to and understood the “Sankhya” philosophy of origin of life, which postulates: -

- In the beginning the Supreme Truth has the intent to create, and the portion that sees itself as separate, PRAKRITI, disintegrates from the whole in a conflagration called Hrinyagarbha (Womb of fire) leaving behind PURUSH.

- Prakriti, which is compact in form, limit and finite structure transcends into Mahat (Intelligence).

- From this Mahat is formed the sense of Individual existence; the “I” creator or Ahamkar.

- Ahamkar gives rise to the three attributes or Gunas- Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

- Sattva provides equilibrium through internalizing Ahamkar and produces the five senses of perception and the five senses of action.

- Rajas provides activity by externalizing Ahamkar.

- Tamas which is endemic of inertia objectifies Ahamkar and produces the objects for the senses.

- Out of these senses; sound, touch, sight, taste and odor are formed the five Mahabhutas or elements namely Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. These are the building blocks of all life forms.

Sadhna

The way to salvation and the self realization of the Absolute Truth lies in persistent and patient Sadhna; in keeping good company and in projecting true love and compassion for humanity. These tenets can be elicited from the following dohas: -

*Kabeer sangat saadhu ki, jo gandhee kee baas.
Jo kachu gandhee dey nahin, tho bhee vaas suvaas*

“Even though you do not receive any perfume when you visit a perfumery, you walk away carrying the fragrance with you. Similarly keeping the company of a good and noble person would transcend their nobility to you.”

On persistence he said: -

*Dheerey dheerey rey manaa, dheerey sab kuch hoy.
Maali seench sou ghataa, ritu aaye phal hoy.*

"In order to achieve results, one has to be persistent in one's efforts. A gardener may water a tree with a hundred pots, but the tree bears fruit only when the right season prevails."

Sadhna or the constant and conscientious awareness of the Supreme Truth, also the core of the concept of bhakti, is the salvation of an individual. Like Buddhist philosophy, Kabir demonstrated in his writings that the world and existence in it are the sum of accrued pain and suffering. Sukh or divine bliss is only attained through Ram Bhajan. This occurs only when the individual stops the self identification with his ego (ahamkar) and raises his awareness of the Paramatman. Then there is an elevation in his consciousness and he evolves into the Supreme. There is an annihilation of the effects of Maya (Illusion that is believed to be the world). There is however, the proviso that all bhakti be Nishkaam- without any desire for a favorable outcome. Since life is only a transitory path to attainment of the greater goal, the utterance of Ram naam brings the goal closer. Obstructions to Sadhna in the form of Mada (conceit), Matsarya (rivalry), Krodh (fury), Kama (unbridled desires) and Moha (infatuation) must be handled on an ongoing basis and rooted out, as indicated in the following doha.

*Kaama krodh aru trishna lobh moh ahankaar.
Yah sab dekho haraam hai, kabe kabeer pukaar*

"Kabir shouts this out that lust, rage, and desire; greed, attachment and egotistical pride are all illegitimate."

Kabir laid great significance in honoring guests, particularly those religious mendicants who had renounced the world, as indicated below: -

*Sain itnaa deejaye, jaa mey kutumbh samai.
Mai bhi bhookhaa naa raboon, sadhu na bhookaa jaiy.*

"Lord, please give me enough so that I may provide for my family and clan. I should not be in want and I should be able to provide for all those good souls who visit my abode."

There is no display of greed in Kabir's prayer. He does not pray for extra wealth, but being a householder, he realizes responsibilities and prays for provision for his family. This doha is significant because it shows Kabir as part of society fulfilling his civic responsibilities.

Vaikhari Speech

Kabir simplified the language of communication. Though born in Kalyug (the age of Kali), Kabir belonged to Satyug (the age of universal truth) where communication was on the higher level of "Para" communication (telepathic communication) which Rishis employed without utterance of a word. There were also elements of Pashyanti communication (clairvoyant perception) in Kabir. Since he was introspective, and sought the Truth within himself, Kabir used Madhyam or mental speech, but he realized that in Kalyug, the finesse and art of self communication was absent. He had to use Vaikhari or vocal speech. The purpose of communication was not to overawe with ritualistic mumbo-jumbo, but to get a point across in common terms for common folks. This was the secret of Kabir's songs and dohas.

*Aisee Vani Boliye, man Ka Aapa Khoye
Apna Tan Sheetal Kare, Auran Ko Sukh Hoye*

"When you speak, utter such words that don't have the malodor of self praise. Let the words keep you calm and composed and let the listeners derive happiness and joy from what you say."

Love and Compassion

Learning, to Kabir, was from experiences of life- not just the present life but from previous incarnations with their cumulative knowledge through the commission of Karma. Love and compassion were foremost in his recipe for spiritual and civic behavior.

As is seen in his other dohas, Kabir denigrates himself and casts himself as the ignorant seeker, as in the following doha : -

*Premi doondat mai phirun, premi milai na koi.
Premi so premi milai, vish sey amrit hoi.*

"I wander in search of my beloved and I find not the one I seek. When one beloved does meet another, the poison of separation changes to the nectar of immortality."

One did not become a learned person through only the study of tomes, as expressed in the following doha : -

*Pothi Padh Padh Kar Jag Mua, Pandit Bhayo Na Koye
Dhai Aakhar Prem Ke, Jo Padhe so Pandit Hoye*

"The world may die reading heavy books; it does not impart any wisdom. Only he who reads the two and half syllables of prem (love) attains true wisdom."

This doha is perhaps of greatest significance in the esoteric meaning of Kabir's words. He speaks not only of the priest class, which professed an ascendant position in society because of scriptural study, but also of love and compassion, which are the true mettle of an individual. Though Kabir was a Ram Bhakt, he was not averse to Vaishnav thought and Krishan was close to his heart. It is no coincidence that the word "Prem" (love) is composed of two and a half syllables just like the word Krishan. Krishan, who is Perfection Personified, is the embodiment of love. His is the unlimited power that controls the cosmos including the mundane world, the spiritual world and the astral world. Esoterically, Krishan is the Soul, the Supreme Godhead, and the Gopis of Vrindhaban, the subject of his amour, are the nadis or channels through which Prana, the life force, circulates.

Krishan is of the Chandra (Lunar) dynasty and Ram is of the Surya (Sun) lineage. The former denotes breathing through the left nostril (Ida nadi) and the latter the right nostril, (Pingal nadi) which in combination form the Purush and Prakriti aspects of the life force, or in medical terms the sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous systems. The Chinese call this combination the yin and the yang.

Kabir was a Yogi. He realized that Ram and Krishan were the opposite sides of the same coin; that they represented essential elements of the Supreme Truth.

Kabir's Significance Today

Almost six hundred years after he died, Kabir continues to amaze and inspire. His words are a wealth of knowledge and experience within easy reach of all folks and have enough substance for scholars to ruminate on for ages. In the present age, where spiritual thought has become subservient to our need for material growth, we need to examine the profound depth of the seemingly simple words of Kabir. They would stoke our spiritual fire (Bhuta agni) and lead to our individual discoveries of the Supreme Truth.

Source of Material used for this article:

Aghora II- Kundalini by Robert E. Svoboda. Aghora III- The Law of Karma by Robert E. Svoboda. for material on Sankhya philosophy of origin of life, Sadhna, Vaikhari speech and Krishan as embodiment of "Prem". Ayurveda by Dr. Vasant Ladd.

Chakras by Harish Johari. Hymns of the Rig Veda. The "Lives of Saints" discourses by Vasanti Mataji. Varanasi Vaibhava. The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Harbans Singh.

India- a history by John Keay.

[Through its aegis, Dr. Syal became a founding member of the Federation of Indian Associations- a body he served as Secretary, President and Chairman. He also was instrumental in founding the Tri-valley Indian Medical association which he led as President. On the cultural front, Dr. Syal performed with the Wandering Players Theater Group and wrote and produced Hindi plays. He authored a Hindi adaptation of "Barefoot in the park." He produced and wrote films for K R Films-Hollywood and is associate producer of the highly acclaimed, "The Gold Bracelet" as well as having a pivotal role in the film. Dr. Syal is an erstwhile writer for "India West" and "India Reporter." He has published poetry in multiple anthologies, and has a collection of novellas, based on his African experience, ready for publication. Dr. Syal is married and lives in Los Angeles with his wife Kiran and daughters Mala and Devika.]

Interaction between the Bhakti and the Sufi Movements in Medieval North India

Prem Kishore Saint, Ph.D.,
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1. Gift of the Bhakti and Sufi Saints

During the medieval times (13th C to 18th C C.E.) when caste system and foreign rule was threatening the structure of the society in north India, Bhakti and Sufi saints showed the way to universal brotherhood. When the scholars were engaged in arid, philosophical speculations and priests and mullahs dominated every day life with oppressive rituals, the saints and sufis spoke from the joyful experience of the heart. When most people thought that becoming a monk, a faqir or a sadhu and renouncing the world was essential to experiencing God, the saints lived as householders, practicing the trades of potters, weavers, gardeners, among others. When God was considered as an impersonal entity, saints and Sufis experienced God as a friend, a companion and a beloved. Even though the movements flourished several hundred years ago, in different times, we can hear their echoes in the kirtan of a Hindu temple, in the qawallis of a Muslim dargah and in the gurbani of a Sikh gurdwara. The origins of the Bhakti movement can be traced to the religious traditions of India from 8th to 12th C C.E.).

2. Origins and Characteristics of the Bhakti Movement

The term bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root word bhaj, to "serve, revere, love, adore", and indicates a personal relationship with God. Bhakti becomes the means as well as the end of the human endeavor. God responds to the devotee with love, divine grace and the emancipation of the human spirit. Although the origin of the bhakti doctrine can be traced to Rig Veda and the Bhagawad Gita, Schwartzberg, Bajpai, Mathur, 1978, enumerate a number of characteristic elements that distinguish the Bhakti Movement of the medieval India:

"1. Insistence that devotionism alone, rather than Vedic sacrifices and ritualism, ascetism, knowledge (jnana), or discipline (yoga), leads to release (moksha);

2. Poetic composition in regional languages, as well as in Sanskrit;
3. Leadership roles by both men and women, of all classes, castes and professions;
4. Non-ritualistic attitudes and the rejection the ritual intermediary, i.e., a priest, between a worshipper and the deity;
5. Disdain for caste;
6. Singing of hymns;
7. Continuance of religio-cultural institutions of the early poet-saints;
8. A succession of poet-saints or gurus;
9. An order and a lay following; and
10. Advocacy of pilgrimage to holy places and shrines, which in time extended beyond the confines of single regions, reinforcing cross-regional interaction."

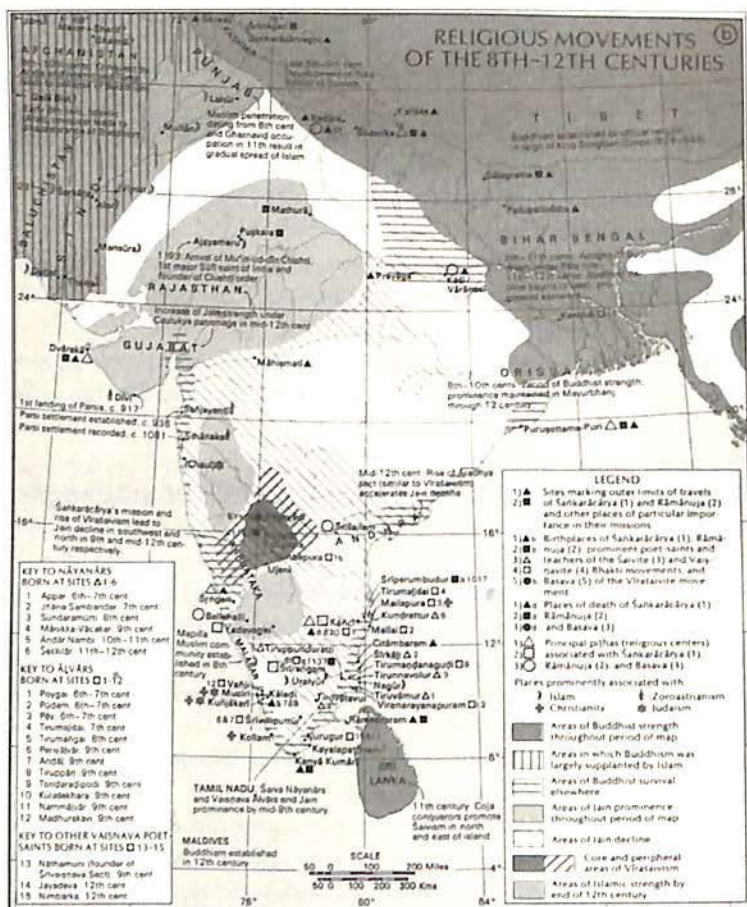
3. Religious Movements of 8th-12th Century India (Map 1, next page)

If we take a mental journey to the religious landscape of India, about 1200 years ago, we'll find a strong presence of Buddhism and Jainism, in the northern and central India. In the south, there arose poet-saints, called Nayanars and Alavars, who inspired the revival of the Hindu Dharma throughout India. There were 63 Nayanars who were Shiva bhaktas and there were 12 Alavars who were Vishnu Bhaktas, all patronized by the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms of that time. The bhakti path of these mystics was later incorporated into Ramanuja and Madhva philosophical systems.

While the Tamil, Andhra and Karnataka regions were swayed by the devotional fervor of the Bhakti poet-saints, there arose a great ascetic-philosopher, Sankaracharya, in Kerala. During his brief life span of 32 years (788-820 A.D.) Sankara propounded Advaita Vedanta (non-dualistic), philosophy. He traveled throughout India three times and established major centers (called pithas or muths). These centers, marked on the map, include Badrika in the north, Puri in the east, Sringeri and Kanchi in the south and Dvarka in the west. These centers exist today and the swamis carry on Sankaracharya's work of religious reform and philosophical enlightenment.

Sankara also recognized the force of the Bhakti Movement and his devotional hymns (panchayatna puja), composed in Sanskrit, are devoted to five Hindu deities: Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya and Ganesa.

In the meanwhile, Buddhism and Jainism in India of 8th to 12th Centuries A.D., were yielding to the assimilation and integrative forces of revitalized Hinduism and were supplanted by the militant, missionary forces of Islam, in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Sind. The Arab conquest of Sind in 712 A.D. and the later conquests by the Ghaznavis and the Ghauris, also brought with them Muslim saintly figures known as Sufis. The Sufis established spiritual



Religious Movements of 8th-12th Centuries India (Map 1 A Historical Atlas South Asia)

centers at Lahur (present Lahore) and Multan, in Punjab; Alor and Thatta in Sind and Ajaymeru (present Ajmer), in Rajasthan. A great Sufi saint, Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti established a Chishti Order in Ajmer and his shrine/dargah is an important site for pilgrimage for Muslim and Hindu devotees, to the present day.

The Iranian Sufis, with their warm, mystical yearning for union and fellowship with God, found a fertile soil of India, where the atmosphere was charged with yoga, Vedanta and bhakti. One of the disciples of Muinuddin was Baba Farid. His successors, Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia (1238-1325 C.E.), preached the love of humanity as a path to love for God. Nizamuddin's pupil,

Amir Khusrau, wrote inspiring Sufi poetry in Hindi and Avadhi. In Punjab arose Sufi poets like Bullah Shah who emphasized harmony and mutual co-operation for realizing God.

4. Saints and Poets of the Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti Movement that spread to Northern India between 13th and 16th century was the result of the simultaneous dynamic interaction between inspired people and their God and between the Hindu and the Sufi saints. Unlike south India where there were Saivite and Vaisnavite sects, in the north they were mostly Vaisnavites, focusing on the devotion to Krishna and Rama, as the avatars of Vishnu. The personages and the location of the activities of the Hindu Saints is shown in Map 2. The groups are divided as:

(i) Krishna Bhaktas, who include Caitanya in Bengal, Vallabhacharya in Gujarat, Mirabai in Rajasthan, Jnandeva in Maharashtra and Madhavacharya in Karnataka.

(ii) Rama Bhaktas, principally including Ramananda, based in Varanasi and who is said to be the guru of Kabir.

(iii) Syncretic and/or Eclectic Saints, including Guru Nanak in Punjab, Namadeva in Maharashtra and Kabir in Uttar Pradesh. Syncretic means the saints who combined different beliefs in religion and philosophy. Eclectic refers to those who choose or select their beliefs and practices from various sources.

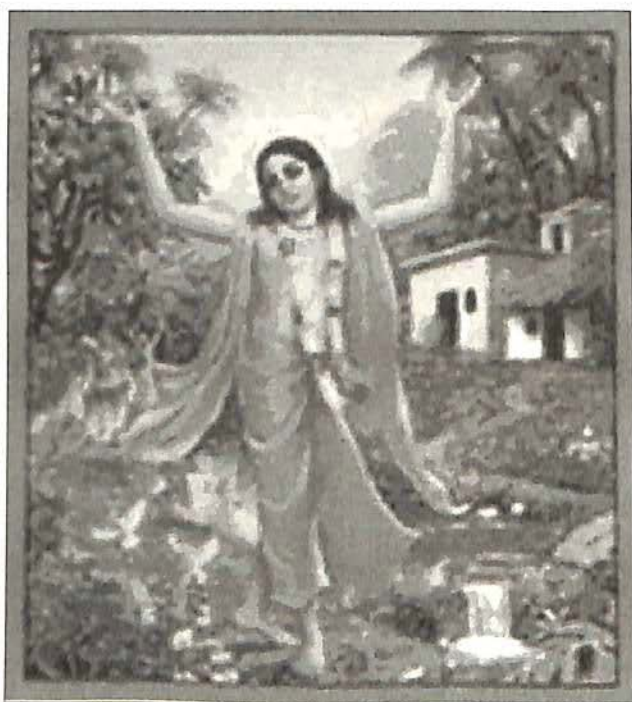
Map 2 also indicates the prominent places associated with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, and with Vallabhacharya and Sri Caitanya. Each of these saints traveled widely in India, both as a pilgrim and as a missionary, following the tradition of Sankaracharya and many other religious leaders who contributed to the cultural unity of India.

This is the era of Mughal Empire expansion and consolidation in Northern and Central India. The contribution of the Bhakti Movement, apart from unifying the masses, was the growth of regional literature and regional movements. These were especially pronounced among the Sikhs in Punjab and among the bhaktas of Bengal and Maharashtra. In many cases the religious sentiment took a marked political opposition to the Mughal rule and to some of its policies of religious intolerance against non-Muslims.

During this later period of the Bhakti Movement there is the development of religious organizations, called panths (paths), associated with the saints like Caitanya (inspiration for the present day Hare Krishna Movement), Kabir (Ka-

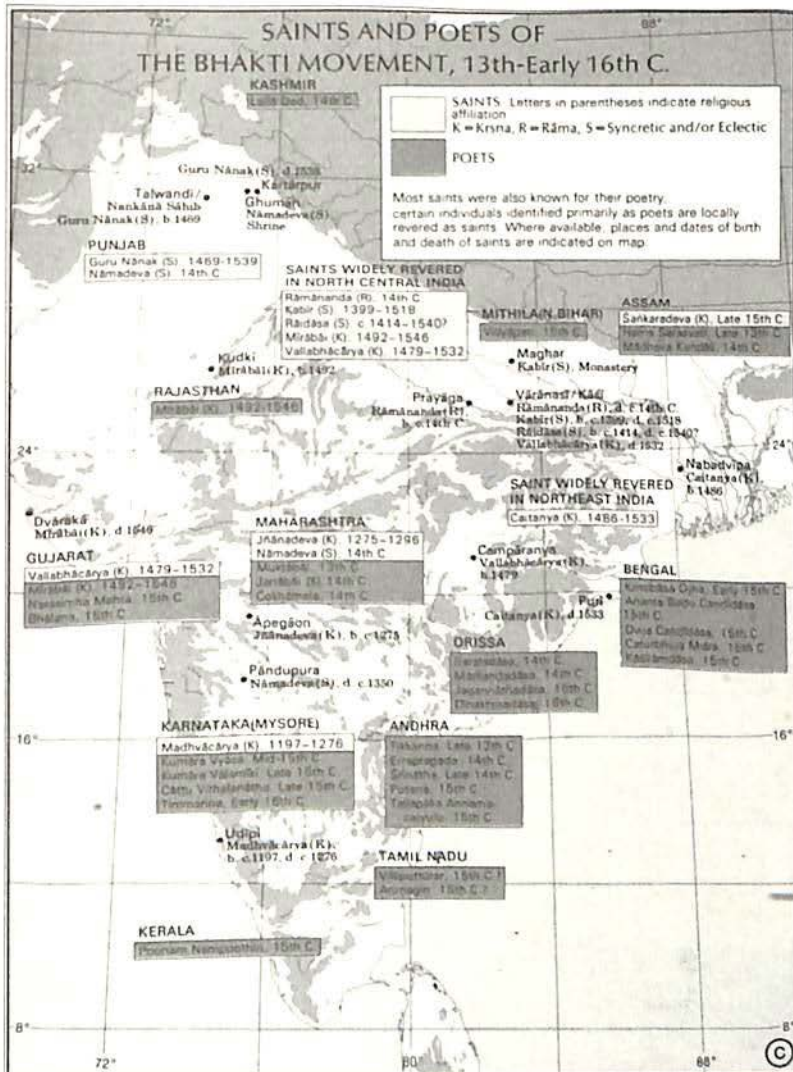


Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh Religion, seen here with two of his principal companions, Banda, a Hindu and Mardana, a Muslim)



Caitanya, in ecstasy with Krishna Bhakti, inspired the Hare Krishna Movement

Thus Says Kabir, "Listen, O' Brethren Sadho!"



*Map 2: Saints and Poets of the Bhakti Movement, 13th-16th Centuries
(from 'A Historical Atlas of South Asia')*

bir Panthis), Dadu (Dadu Panthis), Ram Das (Ram Dasiyas) and Guru Nanak (Sikhs). There is also an explosion of bhakti poetry, most popular among them being the poems of Surdas in Hindi, Akha Bhagat in Gujarati and Tukaram in Marathi. There is also the publication of "Adi Granth" of the Sikhs and the "Rama charit -manas" of Tulsidas.

Map 3 depicts the regional distribution of the personage of the poet saints and the locations of the places of the births and deaths of some of the prominent personalities. Here again the list is as follows:

(i) Krishna Bhaktas: Hindi poets like Surdas, Nabhadass, Sundardass, Nandadas; Marathi poets like Eknath and Tukaram; Bengali poets like Vrindavandas and Krishnadas; Kannada poets like Shrivadarajathirth and Tamil poets like Pillaipermai Ayyangar.

(ii) Ram Bhaktas, like Tulsidas who wrote in Hindi; Ramanujam who wrote in Malayalam and Kshetragna who wrote in Tamil.

(iii) Durga-Shakti Bhaktas, Kabikantan and Ramprasad Sen, who wrote in Bengali.

(iv) Syncretic and Eclectic Saints: These include Sikh Gurus, like Angad, Arjundas, Gobind Singh who wrote in Gurumukhi; Dadu and Akha Bhagat who wrote in Gujarati.

5. Kabir's legacy in the Bhakti-Sufi Interaction and the Synthesis of Spiritual Experience:

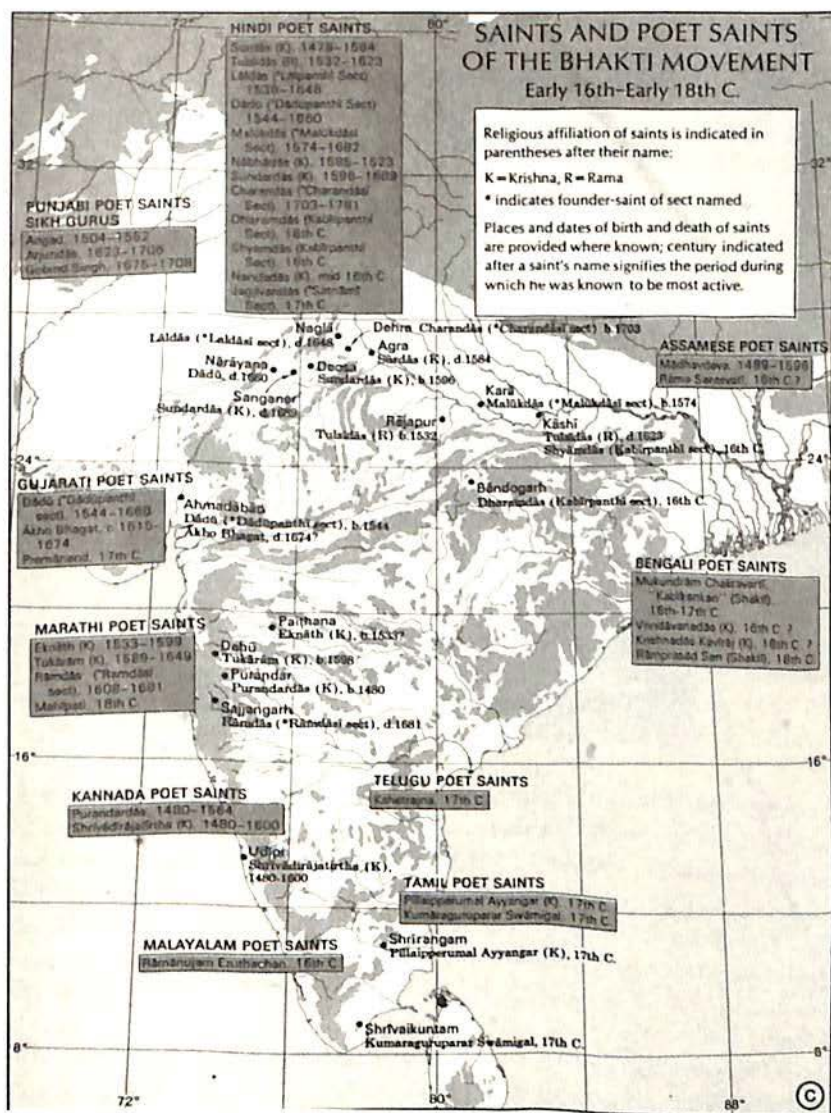
Since both the Bhakti and the Sufi movements are anti-traditional and both seek to do away with ritual aspects of their religious origins, contacts between Bhaktas and Sufis have been cordial and frequent. In fact, some



Left: Bhagat Tulsidas, wrote Ram Charit Manas

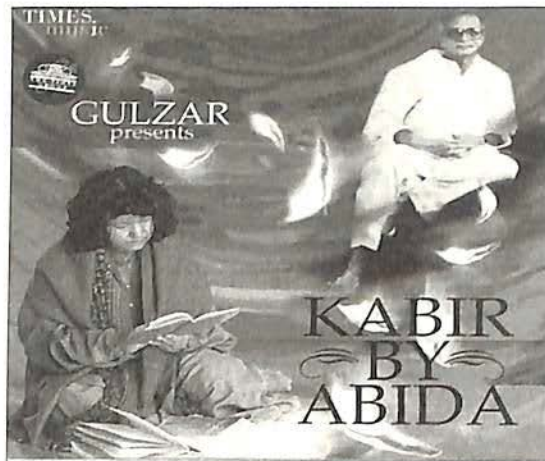


Right: Bhagat Surdas, with soulful Hindi songs of Krishna



Map 3: Saints and Poets of the Bhakti Movement, 16th–18th Centuries (from *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*)

eclectic saints, notably Kabir and Nanak, have been claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. Their common message have been the love of God and the brotherhood and equality of humankind. Their major contribution has been to bridge the gap of enmity and misunderstanding that separated Hindus and Muslims in India. In this respect, Kabir has made a significant contribution to this synthesis and there is a resurgence in seeking out that spirit in the integration of modern India.



The Times of India recently released a CD called "KABIR BY ABIDA", as illustrated in the above title page. Kabir's poems, in the form of couplets (dohas), are sung by the famous Sufi singer, Begum Abida Parveen of Pakistan. The themes of the music are introduced by Gulzar, India's leading poet, lyricist and film maker. The four themes of Kabir's poems are represented by Hindi titles like: "Man Lago Yar Fakiri Mein", "Souun to Sapne Milun, Jagan to Man Mahin", "Sahib Mera Ek Hai, Duja Kaha na Jaye", "Bhala hua Meri Matki Phooti re, Mai to Paniya Bharan se Chhooto re". These titles represent four aspects of his message, respectively of simplicity, steadfast devotion, monotheism and renunciation. Above all, Kabir sings the message of love.

*"Kabir, deck thyself with garments of love.
Love them is given honor who, body and soul, speak the truth."
"Where there is mercy, there is strength,
Where there is forgiveness, there is God...."*

Medieval India is often depicted as an era of dark ages, infested with oppression, injustice, forced conversions and destruction of holy places. Some of these undoubtedly are true, but the more significant truth is the



Kabir, a Bhakta, a Sufi and a Weaver, honored by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, for the wisdom and the spiritual insights he wove into his Hindi poetry. He lived in the present and derived his inspiration from situations in his every day life. And he submitted to a Higher Consciousness, and grace flowed through him.

dynamic interaction of the masses, leading to an era of enlightenment and inspired eloquence. The result was the flowering of the spiritual landscape, with luminaries like Kabir, Nanak, Nam Dev, Tuka Ram, Chaitanya, Farid, Bullah Shah, Meera Bai, Tulsi Das, to name a few. Their legacy is celebrated by millions, to the present day.

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Kabir (1398-1518) — A Literary Perspective

Harshi Syal Gill

The devotees make their obeisance, prostrating themselves in front of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, as the sounds of the 'Granthi' resonate through the hall, mesmerizing the congregation with poetry the likes of which have not been written in any recent past.

In a room, several senior citizens gather, sharing past experiences, remembering greener pastures as they prepare for the winter of their lives. In the background, soft 'ghazals' from a long-forgotten era evoke private thoughts in each one present.

A grandmother sits with her grandchildren around her, totally absorbed in her story as she dramatically recounts tales of valor from the past, imbibing in her stories simple moral messages.

Underlying all these scenarios, and many more, is a common thread that has formed the foundation of much of the Indian lifestyle. Kabir. His poetry. His message. A message that is as relevant today as it was five centuries ago. Kabir. The most quoted of poets in India and among Indians.

Through the centuries, there has been no pioneer greater than Kabir for uniformity in Hindu-Muslim thought. Revered by both alike, he has left a marked impression through the simplicity and the 'folksiness' of his message. Hindus regard him as a 'bhakta', Muslims as a 'pir', Sikhs as a 'bhagat' and the 'Kabir-panthis', an 'avatar' of the Supreme Being.

The most revered and most noted disciple of the Vaishnava ascetic, Swami Ramananda, Kabir incorporates in his philosophy the basic dictum of 'nirguna bhakti', defined variously as "the devotion of Transcendental Absolute, without form, without attributes"(1), or devotion which is "free from the influence of the material qualities of goodness, passion, and ignorance"(2). Poets of nirguna bhakti speak of everyday activities as a service to God, believing in love and surrender as the universal religion.

Kabir is one of the most celebrated followers of the nirguna bhakti tradition, along with others such as Ravidas, Farid and Namdev. Following in his footsteps, Guru Nanak is the other most notable proponent of this tradition, expressing his philosophy in a simple language to reach the maximum number of people. His message was compiled in the 'Adi Granth' by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjun Dev. The Adi Granth includes more than 500 verses by Kabir, leading many Western scholars to regard him as a 'forerunner' of Sikhism.

Kabir was brought up at a time when Brahmin orthodoxy dominated Benares (Varanasi). Belonging to the low caste of Julaha (weaver), Kabir influenced the common villagers not to accept this ill-based dominance, inspiring in them self-pride and dignity through an inward worship of God and not through the rituals preached by the Brahmins.

In his own right, Kabir can be held in high esteem as a social and religious reformer, yet it is as a mystical poet that he is most remembered. Any reference to Kabir's poetry is synonymous with reference to 'dohas', which form a major component of his poetry.

Doha, or couplet, is defined in the Wikipedia as "a form of self-contained rhyming couplet in poetry. This genre of poetry first became common in Apabhramsha and was commonly used in Hindi and Urdu poetry."⁽³⁾ Apabhramsha, a term used by Sanskrit grammarians to refer to dialects of Northern India that deviated from the norms of Sanskrit grammar, evolved into the modern languages of India, such as Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Bengali, etc. While many authors continued to write in Apabhramsha, famous poets such as Amir Khusro and Kabir wrote mostly in what is similar to present day Hindi.

The most famous dohas can definitely be attributed to Kabir, although others such as Tulsidas, Rahim, Surdas and Saraha are no less popular.

Kabir's works have been translated broadly, but for the purposes of this article, reference is made to the translations by Rabindranath Tagore and Rajender Krishan.

Kabir's dohas mark a form of poetry which is an extremely useful tool for expressing terse thoughts with brevity and precision. He maximizes the use of imagery in his dohas, packing each couplet with meaning and emotion.

The use of imagery and metaphor extends to his other songs and writings as well, ranging from 'padas' to 'ramainis' and other literary forms, through which he teaches the true path of righteousness. His message is very simple — that all human beings are divine in essence and it is through the life of a householder, practicing love and compassion, that one can find Truth and God.

No matter what the form, his poetry is rich in its spontaneous expression of love and joy. He embraces a wide range of emotions from the lofty to the mundane, from the most abstract thoughts to the starkly concrete, from the infinite to the finite. Yet the spiritual Truths he moralizes about are not phrased in the language of the learned. Not being a man of letters himself, he

uses what he himself is most familiar with. Just as 'Brahma suits his language to the understanding of His hearer', so Kabir writes so the common man can understand him.

As a poet and a musician, he draws upon the senses evoked by nature and upon everyday experiences as his initiating and inspiring forces. He makes many references to objects of nature. He experiences 'ripples of joy' as 'the sky roars, the lightning flashes, the waves arise', reminding him of the omniscience and omnipresence of God. It is when 'the lotus blossoms', and 'the flowers bloom in clusters' and 'the gardens and groves and bowers are abounding with blossom' that he realizes the existence of God.

His poetry is embedded in striking metaphors and similes illustrating moral, spiritual truth found in incidents of everyday life. In one doha, he writes:

*'In vain is the eminence, just like a date tree
No shade for travelers, fruit is hard to reach.'*

Just as a tall date tree does not offer shade to a weary traveler, nor does it yield its fruit easily, similarly a vain man's eminence does not benefit anybody but himself.

In another doha, he uses the image of a grinding stone, which spares none of the grains of wheat caught in its endless rotation, to impress on the endless cycle of life, which spares nobody. The imagery of the earth and the sky, likened to the wheels of the grinding stone, is a reminder that everything in the cycle of life is mortal.

*'Looking at the grinding stones, Kabir laments
In the duel of wheels, nothing stays intact.'*

There is never a moment of doubt in the mind of this very clear-minded thinker. His vision is lucid and his message fearless. Renouncing and denouncing the written word as the sole source of Truth, he is, doubtless, a heretic who opposed the authoritarian doctrines of both the Hindus and the Muslims. True divinity, according to him, is not to be found in the words preached by either the Pandit or the Mullah. 'The Purana and the Koran are mere words', he says, and 'mere words shall never unite thee to Him.' It is only through Love that man attains true wisdom. 'Dhai akhar prem ke, jo padhe so Pandit hoye' (one who reads the word of Love, only becomes wise).

The appearance of piety, as projected by self-proclaimed religious leaders, is rejected by him as a sham. God, according to him, is 'niether in temple nor in mosque... neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash'. In reality, 'Hari is in the East;

Allah is in the West. Look within your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram'.

Kabir discards all ritual and idol worship in his approach to divinity. He has no tolerance either for rituals and idol worship 'the images are all lifeless, they cannot speak', or for any physical austerities as practiced by the Yogis. He disavows the sanctity of both the Hindu and Muslim faith and boldly condemns the practices of the Brahmin priest, who 'goes house to house and initiates people into faith' or the Yogi 'who has renounced the world in his search for God'. To the Brahmin priest, he says, 'Alas, the true fountain of life is beside you, and you have set up a stone to worship'. To the Yogi, he says, 'Your Lord is near; yet you are climbing the palm-tree to seek Him'.

So WHERE is God to be found? Any one of his poems points to the essence of Kabir's answer to this question. God is within the individual. God is in every aspect of nature, present in a million different forms. God is in the home, in every walk of life, accessible not only to those who renounce the world, but equally to those who stay at home; equally to the washerwoman or the carpenter.

For Kabir, home, with its many manifestations, is where the most significant Reality, the most eternal Truth, is to be found. In fact, true renunciation, just like true love, is opportune within the walls of the home. 'The home', says Kabir, 'is the abiding place; in the home is reality; the home helps to attain Him Who is real.' He is fortunate that he has realized this truth, 'verily I will find both bondage and deliverance in home'.

It is in this very polarity of dualism of 'bondage and deliverance', of the 'double currents of love and detachment', of renunciation within the boundaries of attachment, that he finds Brahma, who can 'play the melody of the Infinite by uniting love and renunciation in life'.

But WHO is Brahma? Brahma is the entity, the Absolute, which is present in each of us and in which each of us is present. He is, ultimately, the Om, the foundation, the founder, the sustainer of the cosmos, a creation of love.

"'Om' is the primal sound or vibration from which the entire universe constantly emanates. It is the sound of creative departure and return." (4)

Kabir acknowledges the Might of Om, for 'from the word Om the Creation sprang' and light is realized through the awareness of 'Hari Om', another expression of God. He appeals to us to seek 'union with Him' in order to be immersed 'in that one great bliss which transcends all pleasure and pain'.

He sees creation as a 'Game of Joy'. All of God's creation is the play of the eternal lover. His sheer joy is seen in many references to dancing. In this respect, he liberally draws on the Hindu Pantheon, using the image of Krishna, the cosmic dancer and flute-player. Dancing represents an everlasting sense of dynamic motion, which speaks of the eternal cycle of life, of the form of

God that is forever changing, of a Reality that is forever evolving. The Creator 'dances in rapture' with 'the sport of Eternal Bliss'. There is a constant swing between the 'poles of the conscious and the unconscious... and that swing never ceases its sway'. In this polarity of experience, ultimate balance is maintained in the form of Brahma.

Kabir is widely labeled as a mystical poet, whose 'religion of love' is immortalized in his poetry; this is due to the Infinite nature of his writing. He brought to fruition the dream of his guru, Ramananda, to bind and fuse the impassioned poetry and deep philosophy of the great Persian mystics, Attar, Sadi, Jalaluddin Rumi and Hafiz, with the traditional theology of Brahmanism in his poetry.

Yet, if that were the only level he wrote about, both his writing and his message would become so esoteric that it would not be within the grasp of the common man. At that level, his message would become monistic in nature, preaching a message that the Soul and God are just one Supreme Energy. While much of the Vedantic and Yogic philosophy has explored the mystical and spiritual element of monism, Kabir escapes this esoteric level by managing to distinguish between the Soul and Brahma, the Creator. He retains the duality of the two. It is part of the 'play' of the Creator that 'the creature is in Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature: they are ever distinct, yet ever united'.

He has achieved the abstract form of God in the concrete, just as he has the concrete in the abstract. Retaining their own identity, the two are still united, like two lovers uniting. The infinite, even while being present in the finite, has the capability of rising above both and attaining a third level of supremacy the Supreme Being the God who transcends the finite and the infinite. He is the 'Pure Being', the 'Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature', who is at once the water in the pitcher and the pitcher in the water:

"The water-filled pitcher is placed upon water, it has water within and without.

It should not be given a name, lest it call forth the error of dualism"

Another doha illustrates, so beautifully, this eternal duality of motion as the Infinite turns to the finite and the finite to the Infinite.

*'Like seed contains the oil, fire in flint stone
Your temple seats the Divine, realize if you can'*

When we see the sesame seed, we don't see its potential for oil; when we see the flint stone, we don't see its potential for fire. The oil and the fire are the positive presence of God. All he asks us to do is to recognize this presence by looking inwards.

Much of his poetry focuses on inner beauty. 'In your body is the garden of flowers. Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus, and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.'

He advises not to keep looking outward, for 'The musk is in the deer, but it seeks it not within itself: it wanders in quest of grass.' The crux of his message is very simply stated:

*'Listen to me, my Friend!
My beloved Lord is within.'*

Kabir's message is best summed up in the words of Evelyn Underhill, "Kabir belongs to that small group of supreme mystics amongst whom St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, and the Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi are perhaps the chief who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the 'sure true Friend' of devotional religion." (5)

Kabir, then, is best immortalized as a mystical poet. He is responding to the world as he sees it, but he is also presenting his vision to the common man. He draws from whatever is available at the moment - whether it is Hindu philosophy, or Sufi imagery, or everyday items such as temple bells, ceremony of the lamps, marriage, suttee, pilgrimage, the washer woman or the seasons - they all represent a relation with Brahma. In developing his own relationship with God, which goes contrary to the norm of the time, which goes against the climate of holy books and holy words as spread by 'mullahs' and pundits, the beauty of his poetry lies in its lovelike quality. At one level, you can read it as sheer love poetry, underlying which is a message clearly intended for the common class and not for the religious leaders. The universality of his responses is embodied in the use of metaphors that are at once recognizable. With great ease he projects these everyday objects into the realm of the Supernatural, at once linking day-to-day experiences as master expressions of the Creator, who evokes in small instances evidence of His presence. Hence, his constant appeals do not look for God in 'mandirs' or mosques, but look within. Look at the small details, for each of us is not equipped to look at the bigger picture. It is in the small details that He manifests Himself. It is in the mundane that the mighty is represented and if we can but learn to recognize His presence, we have built a bridge into stepping into an understanding of the world of the Supreme Lord.

GLOSSARY

Adi Granth	Guru Granth Sahib, holy book of the Sikhs
Avatar	human incarnation of the Supreme Being
Bhagat/Bhakta	a devotee of God
Ghazal	a poetic form which consists of couplets sharing a Rhyme and a refrain
Granthi	a keeper and reader of the Sikh scriptures
Kabir-panthis	followers of Saint Kabir
Mandir	temple
Mullah	Islamic clergy
Pada	a form of sacred poetry, of 10-20 lines which sing the Glory of God
Pir	an Islamic spiritual leader
Ramaini	a poetic form originating from the Ramayana, with Couplets and quadruplets
Sanyas	phase of renunciation in a Hindu's life

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Absolute Mysticism of Kabir

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Kabir's Personality and the Hindu Vedantic Background

Saint Kabir was one of the greatest mystic saints of Northern Hindusthan of the 15th century. His birth, religious faith and death are shrouded in mystery. His real parents are not known because of which he is considered to have a non-biological divine birth. He was picked up as a newly born baby from the bank of Ganga by a Muslim couple, Neera & Neema. They were weavers and the child was reared up as a weaver. The boy had an inborn liking for spiritual life, and was fortunate enough to get opportunities to listen to both Maulavis and Pandits. He was a good observer and thus got acquainted with the good and bad points, strengths and weaknesses in the teachings and practices of the two faiths. But on the whole it appears that the influence of Hinduism was maximum on him. His spiritual Guru was Ramanand whose reputation was the greatest in those days, and had disciples from different sects and castes. Kabir was known in his boyhood as very shrewd who could ask very pointed and baffling questions to the learned persons. This indicated as if he had some initiative understanding of both the secular and spiritual problems. It was difficult for Kabir to get Ramanand as his Guru in a direct way. The story goes that Kabir made a trick. He lay down on one of the steps of the Ganga-ghat, where before dawn Ramanand used to, for his bath in the sacred river. Inadvertently, Ramanand having put his foot on Kabir lying there exclaimed 'Rama Rama'. This Kabir took as initiation and regarded then onwards. Ramanand as his Guru, for whom Kabir has the greatest regard, which he has often expressed in his compositions

In spite of this, Kabir appears to have a very distinctive type of relationship with Ramanand, at least initially, which is evident from the following song:

*guru ramanandji samaj gaho meri baiya
jo balak zunzuniyan khele, unme ka mai nahi hun I*

*thare nanv mai khevatiya nahi, lahar uthe vikarala I
Kabe kabir suno ho ramanandji, jan buz karana chela II*

Kabir addressing his Guru says, "Guru Ramanandji, be very careful in choosing a disciple for yourself. If you want to take my hand, you should take it up after mature consideration. I am not like one of those little children who are satisfied with tinkering toys. If you want to catch hold of my hand, you should hold it firmly and in such a manner that you will never lose its grip. I am not interested in worshipping stone images. My worship is of the One Eternal Reality. I am not one of those thousands (literally 1484) of disciples. In the shallow ship there has been no oarsman, while fiercely high waves are rising. Therefore, says Kabir, hear me Ramanandaji, think well before accepting me as your disciple. "Kabir's approach looks audacious, but it is born of his clear vision of what he wants.

After Kabir's leaving his mortal frame, after a long life of about one hundred twenty years there was a quarrel between his Hindu and Muslim disciples regarding the form of his last post mortem writes. When the cover was removed, the legend goes that instead of the dead body only flowers remained. These were divided among them and were respectively burnt and buried at two paces, namely, Varanasi and Maghar.

It could, however, be gathered from Kabir's varied literature that it is replete with the knowledge of the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads, Shastras, Puranas, Itihasas, Tirthas, Deities, devotees and various traditions, beliefs, and practices. He shows firm belief in the Advaitic Vedanta and the generally accepted ideas of the immortality of soul along with doctrine of karma, reincarnation and the cycle of births and deaths through eighty-four lakhs of different species of lives. He is familiar with the twenty-five principles taught by Sankhya, the doctrine of three gunas, the distinction between saguna and nirguna, between the immanent and transcendent between Brahman, God and Maya. Actually he knows more of Hinduism than any common Hindu. His uniqueness consists in this that he is able to overcome the weaknesses in beliefs and practices, and to shift the eternal from the transitory. In brief, he is interested in the mystical, spiritual experience of the Absolute Divine Principle, called by various names Bhahman, Rama, Krishna, Hari, Keahay, Allah, etc.

He shows particularly very good acquaintance with Pandharpur, the famous pious city in Maharashtra where God Vitthal is situated. He mentions Pundalik, whose devotion to his parents was mainly responsible for bringing God Vishnu from his celestial abode of Vaikuntha to this earth, for the sake of his devotees. Kabir describes Vitthal in the same devotional sentiment, as do the Maharashtrian Vaishnavite Warkari Saints. Kabir himself mentions by names saint Namdev and the other saints of Namdev's times. This shows the great influence of these saints on the northern saints. I have mentioned this particularly because of Kabir's instance on the unity of the nirguna and sauna, which is the most important spiritual ideology of the Marathi saints,

and this was carried to the north by Namdev, and which was initiated by saint Jnanadeva. This consistency between the Absolutistic metaphysics and the devotional approach is the peculiar feature of mysticism as taught by Jnanadeva through his works Jnaneshvari, Amritanubhava, Chandev, pasashti, Haripath, and abhanga-gatha. Kabir's absolutistic mysticism is comparable to that of Jnaneshaver.

Mysticism and the Criteria of its Validity

Gurudev R.D. Ranade has made a fine analyses of mysticism as found in the literature of the three languages in the three books, namely "Pathway to God in Hindi Literature," "Pathway to God in Kannag Literature" which two books followed his earlier one titled, "Mysticism in Maharashtra."

The Mystics of all times and countries have spoken the same language, as denizens of the same spiritual worlds, having no social, communal, national or other prejudices. As Gurudev Renade says, "These together constitute a band of divine musicians, each contributing his own note, and all together producing a harmony that is wonderful" (p.2 General Introduction, Pathway to God in Hindi Literature, Adhyatma Vidya Mandir, Sangli, 1954).

Mysticism consists in a beatific contemplation of God through a direct, immediate intuitive experience, known as "aparokshanubhuti" in Advaita Vedanta. Such an experience constitutes its own criterion of reality, as enjoyed by the mystic himself. It has its own peculiar halo and worth, which is ineffable. This experience includes, intellect, feeling, and will, but at the back of them lies intuition, which inspires and strengthens them all. Intuition is not opposed to these but exceeds them all, as is revealed in Kabir and the other greater mystics.

The mystic shows a penetrating and unfaltering, as well as a powerful philosophical imagination. It is therefore wrong to suppose that the mystical experience is a sort of hallucination or a case of pathology as the avowed empiricists or positivists or rationalists are apt to call it. The greatest of the mystics of the world like Yajnavalkya and Shankaracharya, Plotinus, and Spinoza, Jnaneshwar and Kabir, Shri Aravind, and Ranade of our own age are only a few illustrations from the host of mystics having great intellectual works to their credit. There are, temperamental differences among the mystics. One of the faculties at least of intellectual, emotion and conation is seen developed in a full-fledged manner in a real mystic. It would indeed be a travesty of truth if we consider Kabir, Tulasidas, Surdas, Nanak, Tukaram, Ramada, Narsi, Muktabai, Mirabai, Janabai, Behenabai, Mahaprabhu Chaitanya, Ramkrishna Paramahansa, and the Alwar Saints as pathological cases. In fact they constitute the best of personages among the humanity.

Another criterion of the validity of mythical experience is its capability of strengthening the moral aspect of the individual and social life. It is wrongly supposed that mysticism tends towards a moralism or quietism because of the teaching of absolutism and ineffabilism that is obliterated the distinction between good and evil, right or wrongs. It is true that theoretically the absolute lies beyond all dualism and beyond mind and speech, as the Upanishads teach. But the method of its realization lies through the acquisition of high moral virtues, as described in the Bhagavad-Gita. Especially in the yamas and niyamas in Yoga is the moral basis qualifying in yogin. The practice of these virtues becomes second nature for the spiritual aspirant whom even after perfection of realization, habitually and spontaneously lives a fully virtuous life. He goes beyond the initial exertions of will to distinguish and choose between the opposites, and in his sense only, he is above the perturbations of moral conscience found among the common persons. It is such mystic saints in all religions who become the torchbearers of good life through their concrete exemplary life. Kabir was such a torchbearer who lived spontaneously a moral life before and after spiritual realization.

Again, one another criterion of the mystical experience is its high emotional quality, as found in Mirabel, Surdas or Tukaram. These emotions are in a "Deiform", refined and exalted state. Spinoza would call these transmuted emotions as "intellectual love of God." A sthitaprajna, a Gunatita is at once a Yogin and a Bhakta according to the Gita. Such mystical love of God is seen in Kabir.

A further vital point is the epistemological character of the reality of mystical experience. This point briefly consists of a certain amount of universality in the experience of the mystics. The mystics have the same teaching about the Name of God, of the devotion, the beautification of self-realization, the Absoluteness of Ultimate Reality, and heart-felt peace. The universality, in the kanatian terms, constitutes objectively, necessity and validity of the mystical experience. The saints are the inhabitants of the kingdom of God who incarnate on earth for the true benefit of mankind.

Kabir's Contribution to Mysticism

In the light of the above consideration of mysticism it would be interesting to note some of the important contributions which Kabir has made to mysticism as pointed out by Ranade. In him combine deep philosophical insight and high experience. He describes universal blindness, several stages in the journey of the soul posterior to physical death. He refers to the funeral pyre, which fills him with sadness, and the inscrutable power guided the destiny of the world. He shows awareness of the limits of human freedom. His suggestion that the saint is the personal or saguna aspect and God is the impersonal aspect

of one and the same reality is remarkable. He insists upon the spiritual teacher who has moral, social and mystical qualities. He describes the importance of the name of God, which is to be meditated in silence, especially with the rhythm of breath. He describes the spiritual charkha. The aim of plying it is to propitiate God. He makes a wonderful observation that the sensed which ordinary are meant for their respective unitary objects. In mystic experience they inter-communicate, overcoming their limited exclusive abilities. His account of the various super-sensuous experiences of sound, light, form and color as well as of motor and factual experiences shows his high quality as a mystic. Meditation is attended with the enjoyment of the extraordinary divine juice, which Ranade calls flavourism. It leads to God-intoxication, both intellectual and emotional. This helps to transcend the evil temptations of Maya. Shabda helps in this, which shabda had both metaphysical and epistemological significance. One should not be satisfied with merely the divine music, but it must take us on to the musician, behind the music. Kabir conceives of the Infinite or "Behad." That is the highest experience of the mystics' state of liberation from the limitations of ordinary life.

Kabir's Love Unites Him With God The Beloved

We know to some of his original quotations substantiating some of Kabir's teachings. The following two songs (padas) may be regarded as summing Kabir's position.

*mo ko kahan dhundhe bande, mai to tere pas men I
na mai deval na main masjid, na kabe kailas mai I
na to kon kriya karm mai, nabi yog bairag mai I
khoji hoy to turat milhi, pal bhar ki talas mai I
kahi kabir suno bhai sadho, sab sanso ki sans mai II*

Servant where do you seek me? O! I am by your side only. I am neither in the temple nor in the mosque, neither in Kaba nor in Kailas. I am not the rites and rituals, nor in yoga and renunciation. If you are the earnest seeker, you will meet me soon in a moment's you seek. . Kabir says O seeker (Sadhu). God is the breath of all breaths.

*Haman hai isk mastana, haman ko hoshiyari kya ?
rahe aazad ya jagame, haman duniya se yari kya ?*

—————

*kabira isk ka mata, due ko dur kar dil se I
jo chalna rah najuk hai, haman sar boz bhari kya ?*

I am drunk in the nectar of Divine love. Why need I be cautious? I live freely in his world. Why need I be attached to the world? Those who are separated from their beloved (God), wander from door to door. My beloved is in me. Why need I be in the waiting for any one? The whole world mostly breaks its head for name. I love the name Hari. Why should I associate myself with the world? Not for a moment by beloved is separated from me, nor I am in love with him only. Why should I feel restlessness? Kabir is intoxicated with Divine Love, having removed from his heart all sense of dualism. If a difficult road is to be traversed, why carry a heavy burden on one's head?

Kabir on Maya

In the following song, Kabir describes how man is attached to things and relations, which are transient. Actually he is foreigner in this world. Therefore only God is reliable.

*meri meri duniya karate, moh matsar tan dharate I
aage pir mukadam hote, ve bhi gaye yaun karate I
kisaki mama chacha puni kisaka, kisaka panguda joe I*

*yah sansar bazar mandya hai, janega jan koe II
mai pardeshi kabi pukarau, ihan nahi ko mera I
yah sansar dhundhi sab dekhye, ek bharosa tera II*

Kabir wonders that men take the dream like transitory world and life to be real and yet they remain absorbed in them, abandoning the Ultimate Abode of God.

*sansar esa supin jaisa, jivan supin samana I
sanch kari nari ganthi bandhyo, chandi paaram nidhana II
naina neh patang hulsai, pasu na paikhai aagi I
kaal pasi ju mugdh bandhya, kaman kamini lagi II*

This Maya is difficult to transgress; one gets involved in it.

*maya taju taji nabi jae I
firi firi maya mohi lapatae I*

Knowledge of Brahman is possible only where Maya does not exist.

maya nahi taban brahma jnayana

Maya is so powerful in sheeting that has deceived even Kashave and Shiv. She has occupied important positions like the image of God or water in the sacred places. She is yogini of the yogis, queen of the King. It is for some, diamond for others Bengal - Kawri.

*maya maha thagini ham jani I
nirgun fans liye kar dolai, bole madhuri bani I
keshv ke kamla ho baithi, shiv ke bhavan bhavani I
panda ke murat ho baithi, tirath mai pani I
yogi ke yogin hau baithi, raja ke ghar rani I
kabu ke hira ho baithi, kabu ke kaudi kani II*

Kabir Loves Krishna as Impersonal Absolute

Kabir lays emphasis on experience and knowledge, which ordinary superficial devotees do not have. They are externally white but internally dark.

*bin pratitai pati taudai, jnana baina devali sir faudai I
luchari lapasi aap sandharai, dwarai thadha ram pukaarai II
swang set karaani sani kali, kaha bhayo gali mala dhali I*

Kabir advises to seek God within the lake of one's heart. There is no need of going anywhere else. All sacred places & God are within the body.

*re mana baithi, kitai jini jasi, hirdai sarovar hai avinashi I
kaya madhe koti tirath, kaya madhe kashi I
kaya madhe kavalapati, kaya madhe baikunthvasi I*

If we are able to keep away the mental delusions, God's sportive experience becomes an innately natural event.

mana ka brammbha mana hi kai bhaga, sahajrup hari khelan laga I

There is no dualism between the self and the supreme self. That one is the only reality pervading everything.

mai tai tai mai a dwai nahi, aape akal sakal ghat manhi I

Then one is in a position to experience that in God's immortality lies one's own immortality.

*hari mari hai tau ham hi mari hai, hari na marai hama kabe ku mari-
hai I*

Kabir is Krishna's devotee, as bee of the lotus.

krusna kavaladal bhanver kabira I

But this Krishna is not merely the son of Nanda, but the Absolute or Purna-Brahma, beyond space and time, not one who goes through eighty-four lakhs of life species. For he has neither birth nor death. Kabir is devoted to such Lord

*loka tuza ja kahat hau nand kau nandan I
nand kahau ghun kakau re II*

*das kabir kau thukur aeso
bhagti karai hari takau re II*

The Advaitic Beatific Ineffabilism

Using the advaitic examples of gold and golden ornaments, water and waves, water in and outside the jug, Kabir proves his Vedantic adherence to absolutistic beatifications- ocean of bliss that is the nature of the Lord.

*Jaise bahu kanchan ke bhushan, ye kahi gaali tavanvahige I
aise ham loka ved ke bichure, sunahi manhi samanvahige II
jaise jalahi tarang tarangni, aaise ham dikhlanvahige I
kahee kabir swami sukhasagar, hansahi hans milanvahige II*

In another song he says, when the jug is broken water mingles with water that is the true knowledge.

*jal mai kumbha kumbha mai jal hai, bahir bhitari pani I
futa kumbha jal jalhi samana, yadu tata kathau gayani II*

The experience of the merging in the Absolute in ineffable: The dumb cannot describe the sweetness of the sweets he eats.

*avigat akal anupam dekhyā, kahtan kahya na jai I
sain karai man hi man rahasai, gungai jani mithai II*

Kabir wonderfully describes the uniqueness of Divine love as it tortured by the arrow of Rama, but which wound could not be located or remedied by medicine. All nerves appears to be affected simultaneously.

*ram ban anyayale tir, jahi lage so jane pir I
tan man khojau chota na pau, aausadha muli kahan ghasi laun I
ek hi rup disai sab nari, nan janu ko piyahi piyarai II*

Kabir describes ironically in a song how he is "spoiled" but his association with Rama. He warns others not to get spoiled like him. Sandalwood spoils other woods giving its scent. The paras Mani spoils iron and make it good. The river Ganga spoils the rivulets and purifies them. Similarly devotees of Rama get spoiled and become Rama.

*kabira bigara ram dubai, tumh jini bigari mere bhai I
chandan ke dhib virah ju maila, bigari bigari so chandan haila II
paaras kau loha chivaiga, bigari bigari so kanchan haila I
ganga mai je nir milega, bigari bigari gangordk haila I
kahai kabir je ram kahaila, bigaari bigari so rambi hai II*

God Alone Is, I Am Not

Kabir says just as water takes the form of ice, and again returns to its original nature, so one returns to his original nature.

*pani hi tai him bhaya, him hai gaya bilai I
jo kuch tha soi bhaya, ab kachu kahya na jae II*

God alone is. This truth is expressed in the following way. Nothing is mine. Everything is yours. Having entrusted yours to you, what remains with me?

*mera muzme kuch nahi, jo kuch hai so tera I
tera tuz kau saupata, kya lagai mera II*

It is the sense of ego that is responsible for one's separation from God. If we want to experience Godhood, elimination of egoism is required. The light experienced with dispels all darkness.

jab mai tha tab hari nahi, jab hari hai mai nahi I
sab andhiyara meet gaya, jab dipak dekhyā manhi I

Kabir looks upon this world as a picture, and God as its true artist who should be known. He praises such persons who realize this world as a picture.

jeen yah chitra banaeya, so sachā sutdhar I
kahee kabir te jan bhale, je chitravat lehi bichar II

Kabir, true to his weaver's job, in a metaphor describes God as a weaver and the wares and woofs of good and evil actions wonderfully weave the world. Between earth and sky (that is between the lower and higher parts of the body) there is an empty ditch in which are situated moon and sun (meaning Ida and Oingala Nadis). Through thousand Kumbhakas the weaving goes on, but is difficult to complete.

yah julaha ka maram na jana,
jinh jag aani pasarinhi tana I

kahahi kabir karam se jori,
suta kasut binai bhal kori I

For Kabir, reality transcends all dualism of form and formless, God and Guru, or light and heavy, hunger and thirst, light and shadow, pleasure and pain. Brahman being imperishable and infinite is beyond all description. He concludes that there is nothing like Rama.

rup arup na aavai bola, haru garu kuch jae na bola II
bbukh na bikha, dbup na chanhi, dukh sukh rahita rahai sab mahin II

avigat aprampar barahmabha, bakhana rup saba tham II
bahu vichar kari dekhiya, koe na sarikh ram II

The God is all that is, is described differently by saying that in God is His temple, and also the things required for his worship, and namely leaves water and flowers.

deval mahai dehuri, til jeta vistar I
mahai pati mahi jal, mahai pujanhar II

While contemplating constantly on Rama my mind itself turns into Rama himself. No question of bowing down the head remains.

*mera man sumirai ram kun, mera man rambi aabi I
aab man ramahi hai rahya, sis navavau kabi II*

Devotes full of egoism with little devotion are found in plenty. One, who is without any sense of ego, is like God himself.

*thori bhagati bahut ahankara, aise bhagat mile apara I
kahai kabir jini gaya abhimana, sau bhagata bhagavant samana II*

Guru and God

Kabir regards the need to Guru as inevitable for he alone shows the path of God.

guru bin kaun batave vat I

Yet he also reaches the stage when he sees God within himself

aapai guru aap hi chela I

Kabir gives more importance to the association with sadhu and devotion to God, rather than wandering to the sacred places.

*mathura javai dwaraka bhavai ja jagannath I
sadhu sangati hari bhagati bin kachu na aavai bath II*

Only two are my associates, Vaishnav and God. These two only grant me liberation and make me meditate on His name.

*mere sangi doe jana, aik vaishno aik ram I
vo hai data mukti ka, vo hai sumiravai nam II*

Kabir regards the devotee of God as greater than God, because through the grace of devotee of God, he has seen God; God is indeed within the devotee:

*hari seti harijan jade samazi dekhu manmahi I
kahai kabir jag hari vikhe so hari harijan manhi II*

(Courtesy: Kabir vani issue 2000)

Teaching of Sadguru Kabir

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The interaction between Hindu and Muslim in India took place over a period of several centuries. The two cultures met various levels, such as intellectual, commercial, political and religious. On each of these levels, the two religions influenced each other sometimes peripherally, sometimes deeply. The most important of these levels for this study was the religious. In spite of their very basic differences, the two traditions were forced by circumstances into some kind of interaction even on the orthodox level. However, the point at which the two religious traditions had something in common was mysticism, and both traditions produced non-orthodox mystics who could hardly be distinguished from one another. The system which expresses the culmination of their interaction is called Bhakti Mysticism.

The interaction of Hindu-Muslim ideas through Bhakti Mysticism produced a number of great mystics during the medieval period. The characteristic feature of these Bhakta-mystics was that by no orthodox criterion could they be identified as purely Hindu or Muslim. They were the whole-hearted sadhaks of One God; they found no distinction between man and man, such as Hindu and Muslim; and they considered so-called religious observances, rites and ceremonies as useless for actual spiritual progress. In short, the type of Bhakti mysticism which these sadhaks formulated and propagated was a simple religion devotion (Bhakti) to God which required no outward performance of what are called religious duties, but needed only a pure heart and a sense of absolute surrender to a beloved God. As these bhaktas considered themselves wholehearted lovers of God, the essence of their religion was love for God. The greatest of all these mystics, who were products of an environment engendered by the interaction of the two faiths, was Kabir of Banaras, North India. Kabir occupied a unique position in the history of Indian national heroes, for he is one of the few figures to emerge from the history of Indian religion during the medieval period. Kabir's greatness lies primarily in his sustained effort to unite the Hindu and Muslims who had been antagonistic to one another for centuries. Kabir came to realize that the quarrels between Hindus and the Muslims were based fundamentally on religion.

And was religious prejudice and bias, which prevented the two communities from developing a sense of unity and harmony, even though they were living together in the same society. Therefore, in order to archive his mission, Kabir overtly denounced both Hinduism and Islam. According to him, the traditional form of Hinduism as well as of Islam was only a creation of Hindus and Muslims themselves, for, he maintained, the One God, Allah or Rama, has created only one human race without making any distinction between man and man. Correlative to this basic idea, Kabir argued that since there is One God, regardless of the different names used for Him, and one human race, there could not be many religions. By breaking down all denominational differences based, Kabir tried to formulate a new religion, rather a new piety or a new spirituality, consisting of good elements from both Hinduism and Islam. That religion, primarily based on Bhakti, Kabir hoped would be acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims.

In connection with Kabir's mission, the most significant point to remember is that in his striving to unite the Hindus and the Muslims under the fold of one religion, he consistently kept himself above all religious denominations. In this, he never identified himself as a Hindu or as a Muslim. The only available evidence of his identification is that of a "weaver of Benares". Thus, having kept himself above the level of Hindu-Muslim religious categories, Kabir found himself justified in denouncing both Hinduism and Islam with equal severity. He maintained perfect neutrality and showed no soft heart or preference to either religion. Kabir's distaste for sectarianism can also be seen in the fact that, unlike many bhaktas, he refused to organize any sect of his own followers. His understanding of one human race and a universal brotherhood of human beings prompted him not only to reject and denounce the Hindu caste system, and all sectarianism that was fostered by either Hindus or the Muslims, but also to refuse to constitute a sect of his own followers. His understanding of one human race and a universal of brotherhood of human beings prompted him not only to reject and denounce the Hindu cast system, and all sectarianism that was fostered by either Hindus or the Muslims, but to constitute a sect of his own followers.

Kabir's effort to unite the Hindus and Muslims on one religion-social platform was crowned with success, at least during his lifetime. But immediately after his death, his followers split up into two separate camps - Hindus and Muslims -thus pulling down the entire structure for which Kabir had struggled so hard. The Kabir-panthis built up their own sectarian tradition in spite of Kabir's warnings, and produced a galaxy of literature in the name of Kabir. The history of the Kabir-panthis falls outside the scope of this work. In spite of his good intentions, people misunderstood Kabir both during his lifetime and after his death. His strange ideas puzzled people at home and created enemies outside. His mother and wife rebuked him for this.

Involvement in matters of religion, which, they thought, was the business of Brahmins and Mullahs. Being a member of a Muslims family, his utterance of the name of the Hindu God, Rama embarrassed his parents and his wife. Outside his family, the Brahmins and the Mullahs raised a hue and cry against Kabir's ideas. First of all, his denunciation of the sanctified position claimed by those so-called guardians of religion engendered open hostility against him. Second, both Hindu and Muslim religious personages found it impossible to tolerate the authority of a low-caste man like Kabir speaking on religious matters. Third, Kabir's overt rejection of both traditional Hinduism and Islam, his preaching of the idea of one religion for the people of India, and his ignoring the distinction that is implied by names like Allah and Rama, were considered sacrilege by orthodox Hindus and Muslim. According to the legends, these enemies tried to get him penalized by the Muslim administration of that time.

When Kabir died, his Muslim and Hindu followers quarreled over his corpse and have to quarrel ever since. As a result the history of his life has been greatly distorted, with the record being so obscured that some writers have even doubted the existence of Kabir. Others, while not hesitating to accept the fact that Kabir was an actual human being, find it difficult to agree on what his true teaching was. Some of these writers try to treat Kabir as a Hindu, while others attempt to see him exclusively as a Muslim Sufi.

Where are we to find reliable information concerning Kabir's life and teaching? To begin with, the *Bijak* is taken as the treasure house for Kabir's teaching. However, it must be admitted that even *Bijak* does not contain every word of Kabir. It was compiled by his disciples long after his death. Naturally, the possibility of additions to Kabir's original sayings cannot be ruled out completely. Although facts and legends are mixed up through the ages, it is not altogether impossible to sift the genuine sayings of Kabir from the apocryphal within the *Bijak*. By a study of Kabir's sayings as recorded in the *Bijak*, we are able to see that there is a kind of single line of thought, though it is far from being logically consistent.

The second source for information concerning Kabir's life and teaching is the *Adi Granth*, the religious scripture of Sikhism. The Kabir saying occupies a considerable portion of this scripture. The status given to Kabir's sayings in the *Adi Granth* (or the *Granth Sahib*) is taken as a testimony to the authenticity of his sayings. However, as in the case of the *Bijak*, some additions and modifications can also be expected in the *Adi Granth*. A small number of Kabir's sayings are found both in the *Bijak* and in the *Adi Granth*, with slight difference in phrasing. This discrepancy is probably due to two oral traditions, which served as kernel for the formation of the two scriptures.

In addition to these contemporary and near contemporary sources, the one Hundred Poems of Kabir by Rabindranath Tagore also provides some reflec-

tions of Kabir's teaching. Besides these, some information regarding Kabir's life and teaching can be gleaned from secular sources. These evidences are carefully collected in the Indian National Biography Series: Kabir, and other standard history books. In this work we will rely on both the scriptural and the secular sources. A careful study of all information as collected from sources will help us to form a fairly correct view about Kabir's life and teaching.

On the basis of this historical information, we hope to find some key by which to reinterpret Kabir's saying in the light of their historical perspective. Our main object will be not so much to give new information as to reinterpret the information already at our disposal and to argue that Kabir's thought was the product of the interaction of Hindu-Muslim idea in Bhakti mysticism. Secondly, we wish to show how Kabir tried to bind the Hindus and the Muslims together with a single religion-social rope and thereby resolve the historical tension extant between them. We will argue that in order to achieve this goal he consistently kept himself above Hindu-Muslims sectarian identification.

Summary

The nature of Kabir's teaching may be summarized in the following word: He has gazed into the mystery of life and seen the vision of the ineffable light. He brings from the world of beyond a new message for the individual and for society. He dreams of a future purified of inequalities; he preaches a religion based on the only foundation on which faith can stand namely personal experience. He brushed aside unhesitatingly the whole paraphernalia of dogma and authority, for his soul is sick of the sorry spectacle of the quarrels of creeds and the worship of empty shells of formal religion. He tolerates no shames and demands reality in the search after God. In other words, Kabir would teach us that if we care for truth and spiritual life, we should get rid of all artificial hindrances. We should be true to our own self, and be natural. Truth is natural and free from artifice, and we need not look for it in the external. Truth remains within. We have to find it out by love and devotion. We must not cherish ill will towards any one, not injure any life, for God dwells in every creature. To Kabir, it is the same God; earnestly sought after in all religions, which differ only in the way they call upon Him. This makes futile the religious quarrels that go on between Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, give up all quarrels; we are all children of one God, to whom we must direct our Bhakti with heart and soul. We should have our hearts filled with divine love and devotion. This life is not permanent, but temporary. So without losing time in vain pursuits seek refuge with God. We need not seek Him in the external world by performing rituals and ceremonies; we must seek Him within our hearts where He dwells.

KABIR'S SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Before coming up with any clear concept of God, man and his relations with God, Kabir seems to have been passing through the stage of spiritual crisis and bewilderment. As a positive thinker, we find him confronting the great mysteries of life, and reaching to them. Thus he says:

*The string is broken (life has departed)
thy brain destroyed; whither hath thy speech gone?
I feel this anxiety night and day; who will
explain and ease my mind? (Adi-Granth, Gauri 52)*

The answer he heard from Hindu and Muslim religious persons brought no peace of mind and satisfaction. They appear to him to be too insistent on the externals of religion and the tiresome round of ritual and ceremony, which he despises as hollow and sham. He however, finds solace for his mind by turning Inward:

*Saith Kabir, my attention is directed to that
place where God dwelt night and day;
His secret He Himself fully knoweth; He is
ever imperishable. (Adi-Granth, Gauri 52)*

Kabir has described his spiritual awakening metaphorically in the following verses:

*Kabir being beaten cried much; in pain he cries [even] more;
[After] a blow has hit the vital part,
Kabir remained dead on the spot.
Kabir says, the blow of the spear is easy,
in being applied it takes away the breath.
[But he who] undergoes the blow of the sabda
of that guru I am the slave. (Adi-Granth, Slokas 182,183)*

The above verses appear to imply that the Sabda (Word) of the Guru (God) which brought to him enlightenment seemed like a heavy blow. The state of Kabir prior to the occurrence of this experience came to an end, and now Kabir finds himself as if he was born with new ideas. This is the spiritual experience which seems to have made Kabir a religious teacher and reformer.

In another place Kabir has described his spiritual awakening more clearly:

*O! My brethren, a storm of divine knowledge hath come;
The screens doubt have all been blown away,
and even the ropes of mammon have not been left;
The two props of indecision (whether man inclines to God or
the world) have been thrown down,
and the beam of worldly love hath been broken;
The thatched roof of avarice hath fallen to the ground, and
the vessel of evil inclinations hath burst.
Saith Kabir, thy slave, O Lord, hath become saturated
By the Rain (Internal Happiness) Which Fell After The Storm.
And When Next He Saw The Sun Appear (When He Saw God After
The Attainment Of Divine Knowledge) His Mind Was Illumined
(Adi-Granth, Gauri And Soratha 43)*

Kabir's Concept Of God; Rama Or Allah; The Unity Of God

After his spiritual awakening, one of the fundamental ideas which Kabir had in clear terms is his concept of God. Kabir says:

*He is one: there is no second (Bijak Sabda 43)
Rama, Khuda, Sakti, Siva, are one: tell me, pray, how will you
distinguish them (Bijak, Sabda 48). By the One name I hold fast;
this Kabir proclaims aloud (Bijak, Sabda 62). The one Name,
like the tree of life, saveth mankind. They who are
regenerated by God shall never alter. Saith Kabir. I have
recognized God's name (Adi-Granth, Gauri 37)*

Having giving a simple description of the oneness of God, Kabir tells us different appellation of God are only expressions of one and the same according to him, it matters little by what name we call Him. Elsewhere aims takes up the subject of the unity of God, and criticizes the Hindus and Muslims who conceive of different gods. Thus he says;

*Rama, Khuda, Sakti, Siva are one. Then to whom do the prayers go?
The Vedas, the Puranas and the Quran are only different manners
of description. Neither the Hindu, nor the Turk, neither the Jain
nor the Yogi is cognizant of the secret (Bijak, Sabda 28)*

In another places Kabir elaborates the theme of God's omnipresence and condemns the narrow-mindedness of the two communities who try to keep God to their respective places, Whereas Kabir asserts that God is universal and is present everywhere especially in the human heart. Thus he says;

if God dwelt only in the mosque, to who belong the rest of the country? They who are called Hindus say that God dwelleth in an idol: I cannot see the truth in either sect. O God, whether Allah or Rama, I live by thy name, O Lord, show kindness unto me. Hari dwelleth in the south, Allah hath His place in the West (Makka). Search in thy heart of hearts; there is his place and abode.

The men and women thou have created, O God are all in thy form. Kabir is the child of Rama and Allah, and accepted all gurus and pirs Saith Kabir, hear O men and women, seek the sanctuary of the one God; O mortals, only repeat God's name, and then shall you be assuredly saved (Adi-Granth, Prabhati 2)

As we can see, in these verses, apart from asserting the oneness of God, His omnipresence, and in a typical mystical tone finding the human heart as the abode of God, Kabir affirmed that he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, but a child of the one God who is known by different names.

Although Kabir believes in the unity of God, he uses many names for God. He uses many names for God, but the name which recurs most in his saying is Rama. However, in order to remove all ambiguity and confusion, Kabir has articulated his conception of Rama in the following verses:

*The Creator did not marry Sita nor did he
make a stone bridge across the waters (Bijak, Sabda 8)
they say the lord of the world finding
inequalities of the weak and the strong
came as Rama. But Kabir says, before such
a one (Rama) who took birth and died,
I cannot bend my head.
In another place Kabir says:
Follow the true Sahib (God) who will uphold you in all your trials.
He was not born in Dasaratha's family and did
not oppress the king of Lanka.
He did not fight with king Bali nor did he kill
Hiranyaksa, throwing him down on the ground.*

In his verses rejecting the doctrine of avatar of Rama and Krsna, Kabir has made it absolutely clear that his God, Rama, did not take birth in the family of king Dasaratha. By 'Rama', he meant not the epic hero, the son of king Dasaratha, but the True Guru, The one God, The True Name.

KABIR'S VIEW OF KARMA AND SAMSARA

KARMA (action: good or bad)

SAMSARA (transmigration of soul)

The goal of the teachings of the Upanisads is to secure moksa (release or salvation) from the cyclic order of life, death and rebirth; to which the law of Karma or the results of our actions bind us. According to Kabir, as in the Indian tradition, a man is bound by his actions, and every act is productive of future good or ill. Evil deeds destine a man to punishment by his being born in a lower state of life in his next birth. But the weary round of births and rebirths goes on till the chain of samsaras is cut through the results of good actions, and thus is achieved salvation. Here Kabir speaks on the doctrine of metempsychosis:

*I was in immobile and mobile creatures,
In worms and in moths;
I passed through many births of various kinds.
In this way I occupied many bodies,
But when, O God, I assumed human birth,
I was a Yogi, a Jati, a penitent, a Brahmchari,
Sometimes a king, an emperor, and sometimes
a beggar (Adi Granth, Gauri 13).*

In another place Kabir tells us that he has found God (mukti) and thus put an end to transmigration:

*Though I have assumed many shapes, this is my last.
The strings and wires of the musical instrument are all worn out;
I am now in the power of God's name;
I shall not have again to dance to the tune of birth and death;
Nor shall my heart accompany on the drum.
I have taken and destroyed my bodily lust and anger;
The pitcher of avarice hath burst;
Lust's raiment hath grown old, and all my doubts are dispelled.
I recognized one God in all creatures;
Vain wrangling on this subject is at end.
Saith Kabir, when God was gracious unto me,
I obtained Him, the Perfect One (Adi Granth, Asa 28).
All men bound by their acts transmigrate,
Attentively consider this (Adi Granth, Gauri 50)*

Elsewhere Kabir says:

*Birth is in accordance with penalties for deeds (Bijak, Ramaini 62).
Through wanderings and error man comes again
To his house (Bijak, Ramaini 25).
The soul plays in many forms- in various garbs;
Men like bees are swept away.
After birth and death, it comes again into a body. (Bijak, Ramaini 84).
On account of Karma, one appeared in the womb. (Bijak, Ramaini 39).*

In the following verses Kabir says that when the deadly sins are subdued man arrives at the knowledge of the one God and obtains salvation.

When the wick of pride is dry and the oil of worldly love is spent;

—————

*When the strings are broken, the rebeck no longer playeth,
Man hath ruined his affairs by error
When man obtaineth understanding he shall forget
Preaching, ranting, arguing, and intoning.
Saith Kabir, the highest dignity shall not be far from those
Who crush their deadly sins (Adi Granth, Asa 11).*

Kabir's Concept Of The Transitory Nature Of The World

Kabir was a weaver. Sometimes he expresses his idea of the world and our existence in it bound by the law of Karma in the language of a weaver:

*As a bird percheth on a tree, such is the world (transitory).
I have drunk the elixirs are forgotten.
Since we are not permanent ourselves,
Why should we mourn the death of others:
Whatever is born perisheth;
Why should we be sorry and weep for that?
When man becomes attached to holy man,
He drunkest God's elixir, and is devoted
to Him from whom he hath sprung.
Said Kabir, I have thought of Got in my heart;
Resigning the world remember Him (Adi Granth, Gauri 64).
No one know the mystery of that weaver*

*Who came into the world and spread the warp.
The earth and the sky are the two beams,
The sun and the moon are two filled shuttles,
Taking a thousand threads he spreads them lengthways;
Today he weaves still, but hard to reach is the
far off end (Bijak, Ramaini 28).*

It seems that by threads Kabir alludes to the threads of Karma, and the fabric into which they are woven appears to be the human body which is the sum total of consciousness and unconsciousness.

Kabir's Concept Of Death

In the following verses Kabir says that all must die at last; God's name is their only support:

*Jogis, celibates, penitents, anchorites,
they who wander on many pilgrimages.
They who pluck out and shave their hair,
Wear matted locks, must all die at last; wherefore worship God.
What can the Jumna do for those whose tongues love God's name?
They who know the Sastras, the Vedas,
Astrology, and various languages,
Who know written and spoken incantations?
And all medical science must die at last.
They who enjoy empires, umbrellas, thrones many beautiful women,
Betel, camphor, and highly fragrant sandal must die at last.
The Veds, Puranas, and Smrtis I have
All searched, but there is no salvation anywhere in them.
Saith Kabir, so repeat God's name that transmigration
may be at end (Adi Granth, Asa 5).*

Kabir's Moral And Ethical Teaching

As a corollary to his sense of humility, and his consciousness of the impermanence of the world and everything in it, Kabir teaches us to give up pride, ego, covetousness, anger, etc. Kabir's moral and ethical teaching can be compared with those of the Buddha, or for that of any great mystic of the world. His verses teaching morality are simple but extremely penetrating and appealing. Thus he says:

*What is the use of greatness?
The palm is a tall tree,*

But none sits under its shade and its fruit is out of reach.
 The tree bears not fruit for itself,
 Nor for itself does the stream collect its waters; for the benefit of others
 Alone does the sage assume a bodily shape.
 The pride of intellect is manifold,
 Now a swindler, now a thief; now a liar,
 Now a murderer; men, sages and gods have
 Run after it in vain; its mansion has a hundred gates.
 In pride there is adversity, in sin there is
 Suffering; in kindness there is stability,
 And in forgiveness there is God.
 The righteous man does not give us his piety,
 Though he meets with cores of wicked persons;
 Even as the sandal tree is not deprived of
 It's cooling properties though venomous snakes twine round it.
 The black snake is in the heart.
 It has deposited venom in the souls of all;
 The few, who sincerely worship the true God, will be saved.
 To be truthful is best of all, if the heart be truthful.
 A man may speak as much as he likes;
 But there is no pleasure apart from truthfulness.
 He who has no check upon his tongue, no truth is in his heart:
 With such a one keep not company
 He will kill you on the highway.

You call yourselves pandits, virtuous brave.
 Generous and asset that you alone are great;
 It is only when this pride of yours is forgotten
 that you shall be absorbed in him from whom you sprang.
 Only he understandeth whom Thou, O God.
 Causes to understand (cf Q.2.272)
 how can man obtain permanence without
 Understanding (Adi Granth, Gauri 51).

In another place Kabir says in an eloquent language how he subdued his
 evil passions by waging a war. At the end of the war he won, he
 obtained salvation.

How shall I subdued this beautiful fortress (body), my brother,
 which hath double walls (doubts and wrong-headedness).
 And triple moats (three gunas),
 Whose entrenchments are the five subtle elements?
 The twenty-five categories (Sankhya conception of body) worldly love

*pride, jealousy, and very powerful Maya?
 I who am poor cannot obtain strength to take
 that fortress; what shall I do O God?
 Lust is its folding doors, woe and weat its
 Gatekeepers, demerits and merits its gates.
 Anger which is very quarrelsome its commander,
 And the heart its rebel kings.
 The defenders had dainties for their coats of mail.
 Egoism for the helmets and evil understanding,
 For their bows they draw;
 Covetousness which dwelt in the quiver of the heart;
 became their arrows; thus the fortress was impregnable;
 But I made divine love the fuss,
 meditation the howitzer and divine knowledge the shells;
 I gently lit the fuse with the fire of God's name,
 and captured the fortress with one shot.
 I began to flight assisted by truth and contentment,
 and battered both its door.
 By the favor of the congregation of the saints
 And of the guru I made its king a prisoner.
 By dint of remembering God I a coward have cut the noose of Death
 The slave Kabir hath called the fortress and secured
 An imperishable empire (Adi Granth, Ehairo 17)*

Kabir's Concept of the Final Goal

From these verses we get a clear idea that Kabir, like other Hindu a Muslim, mystics recognizes the final goal of the soul; the union with God which he was striving. That union being his ultimate goal, he has no desire heaven or hell, but only for God's love, thus he says:

*For those who know Him not, are heaven and hell;
 They who know Hari have no part in them
 I have no thought for sin or virtue:
 Neither to heaven nor hell go I (Bijak, sabda 442)*

How does one obtain salvation or union with God? We have seen so that Kabir has told us all the means of achieving a spiritual communion with God.

Kabir also uses merchant's terminology sometimes in expressing spiritual matters.

For example:

*Some deal in bronze and copper, others in cloves and betel nut
 The saints deal in God's name; that is my merchandise.
 O dealers in the name of God.
 The priceless diamond hath come to hand
 And worldly thoughts have fled.
 They whom the True One attached to truth
 Remain attached to it; truth is their occupation.
 They dispatched a load of the true thing.
 And it reached God, the storekeeper.
 God is himself the gem, the jewel, and the precious stone.
 He is himself the jeweler,
 He is in every direction...
 He stetched everything in motion; he is a permanent dealer.
 O man, make thy heart the ox, meditation the road
 Fill thy sack with divine knowledge and load it on the ox
 Saith Kabir, hear O saints, y goods have arrived
 At their destination*

The verses are regarded as the finest allegory by which Kabir has described his idea about reaching God. In the final lines, he has told us definitely that his effort have borne him fruit, that is he has achieved a union with God.

(Note: The word *Bijak* means: (1) essence or seed, (2) an invoice, and (3) a key to a hidden treasure or a document by which a hidden treasure can be located.)

Courtesy: Bhaktavani USA, April '95 and August '95.

From the book *Kabir the Apostle of Hindu Muslim Unity*, Dr. Hedayetullah Muuhammad. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarasidas Pvt. Ltd., 1977. Compiled and narrated by Dipakshanker Patel.

Introduction to Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj

Anand Haribhai Bhakta (M.B.A.)

Anand belongs to a religious organization called Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj. It is branch religion of Hinduism. Identifying a person belonging to this organization is very easy. Any person having the last name "Bhakta" belongs to this organization. The Bhaktas are originally from Surat and Kanam Districts near Baroda, in the state of Gujarat, India. Leaving India, we have settled all around the world.

The first Bhaktas came to America in the 1920's. Most came here to pursue higher education in American Universities; others came to seek economic advancement. In India, most of these people were farmers and cultivators in the state of Gujarat.

They had very little business experience but after hard work and dedication, Bhaktas have excelled in all fields as businessmen, storekeepers, doctors, engineers, etc.

Kabir

The Bhakta Samaj greatly follows the teachings of the saint Kabir. Kabir was born in 1398 and died in 1512; he lived more than 100 years. There are many legends of his birth. The one commonly accepted by Bhaktas is that he was found lying in the water. A Muslim couple found him and raised him. At a young age, he sang divine songs and repeated the words "Ram", the name of God (in Hinduism). Being a Muslim, this was highly looked down upon. As he grew up, he did not follow Hinduism or Islam. He tried to ease the religious tension in that period. He simply would answer, "The same Lord live both in the Hindu and the Muslim bodies. He is not the monopoly of any." (Ezekiel, p.50)

He criticized the ritualistic superstitions of both religions. Compared to the prevalent times, his views were highly heretic. He denounced the caste system and was totally against idol worship. He greatly criticized strict asceticism, pilgrimages, and fasting. He commented, "Why do you go to the Mosque built by human hands? The Lord dwells not there. Search for Him

within your body, and you will get Him without the help of a priest." (Ezekiel, P. 35). Kabir also criticized the priests, "If union with God could be obtained by going about naked, all the beasts of the forest would get Him. If God could be obtained by shaving, all the sheep would be saved. If celibacy would lead to God, all the eunuchs would become saints." (Ezekiel, P. 35). Kabir followed a simple lifestyle. He was a weaver, and at times was very poor. Kabir helped others even when he and his family were in economic difficulties. In many ways Kabir was a heretic; however he was also a conformist. He advocated vegetarianism; animals are a form of life and they should not be killed. Kabir did not believe in celibacy, but he was against indulging in sex. Drugs and other intoxicating means were not acceptable to reach the Spiritual path. As traditional Hindus, Kabir also recognized maya, the world as an illusion. He said one should strive to go above the normal life, and must not be attached to anything. Everything should be done in moderation. Through these means, a person can reach eternal bliss. The religious goal is to realize that God is within oneself. As a result, one must be dedicated in devotion and must do good deeds. These beliefs are the foundation for the Bhakta Samaj.

Kabir practiced bhakti and karma yogas. Therefore, Bhaktas have also adopted these religious practices. Bhaktas are completely devoted to Kabir, Along with Krishna; he is regarded as the Supreme Deity.

Bhakti Yoga And Bhajans

Bhakti yoga or devotional religion is done towards Kabir and Krishna. Bhaktas worship by singing devotional songs called bhajans. They are sung by a single person or in a group; with or without music. Bhajans can be sung in the morning, evening, or any other time.

Religious ceremonies in other Hindu religions are highly structured; elaborate and a priest in Sanskrit conducts expensive rituals. However, in contrast, bhajan sessions done by Bhaktas, eliminates the priest. The singer addresses the Almighty himself in simple language, Gujarati and/or Hindi. This style of worship directly comes from Kabir. Bhaktas celebrate births, marriages, and mourn death by singing bhajans. Some of the bhajans are part of other Hindu sects, others are exclusively sung only by Bhaktas. Some bhajans in this collection are by the great poets and saints: Kabir, Meera, Narsinh Mehta, and Tulsidas.

These bhajans deal with a variety of topics. Some bhajans tell of Krishna's early life, and others are quite philosophical in nature. For instance, one bhajan that my family sings each evening celebrates life. Human life is the highest form achievable. Being a human we have the most valuable opportunity to do good deeds and attain emancipation. One should, rather than gloating in self-indulgence and vanity, one should practice self-restraint and moderation.

In this Bhajan, Kabir cautions, "Human life one only gets once- there is no second chance. An over-ripe fruit falls on the ground and never gets a second chance to cling to the tree again." (Translated from Gujarati). Other bhajans tell us that the world is full of material illusion, and a true Bhakta goes above the materialism. Some bhajans, which are sung anytime, praise the Lord for creating us. God is the Supreme power because he has given us "...two eyes to see, a tongue to talk, rivers to drink from...you are great God; we are no one compared to you." (Translated form Gujarati).

Karma Yoga

Along with bhakti yoga and singing bhajans, Bhaktas greatly follow the ideas of karma yoga written about in the Bhagavad-Gita (and talked about by Kabir). Because of the belief of reincarnation, Bhaktas, are very moral and friendly people. It is believed without true love for humanity, there cannot be real devotion; thus no salvation. As a result, Bhaktas do not indulge in slander and refrain from violence. Most Bhaktas are vegetarian and avoid alcohol and drugs. (However, this trend is changing; young Bhaktas in the US are starting to eat meat and drink.) Bhaktas try their best to be good citizens, so they can have a better life after they die. If guests arrive at a Bhakta family's home, they will be treated like royalty. First the host will bow and say "Ramkabir." Ramkabir originates long ago when a guru saw Kabir in the form of Ram-the god of the Ramayana. The guru bowed and his first words were "Ramkabir." After this friendly greeting, the guests are offered food and a place to reside. These customs are consistent with what Kabir did in his lifetime.

The Gadi

Each Bhakta home has a sacred place called "gadi." It is a place to worship usually in the morning and sunset. A purified butter called "ghee" and a cotton wick are used to make a sacred light at the gadi called a "divo." Incense is burned to get rid of the devil and purify the surroundings. Holy books such as the Bhagavad-Gita, Upanisads, Vedas, and other religious scriptures are found in the gadi. Pictures of Kabir and Krishna are found in the homes of all Bhaktas.

Along these pictures, many people also keep pictures and sculptures of other deities like Shiva, Hanuman, Jalaram, Ram, Ganesha, etc. At a specified time each family member sits by the gadi and participates in prayer and singing of bhajans.

Death In The Family

There are many events and rituals done by the Bhakta Samaj, which are very unique. For instance, when death occurs in the family; there are specific things done. First, the deceased body is groomed with flowers. Then, the body is put on a chair; family members hold the body so it will not fall down. A female in the family takes a plate with five divas in it and moves it around in a circular motion around the body. This is a call for God to open the gates of heaven and accept the soul from the dead body. After this ritual, the body is carried to the cremation site. Before, after, and during the cremation special mantras and bhajans are sung. The family keeps the ashes that remain. When time is available, a family member will take the ashes to India and place them in the Ganges River. For a month after cremation, there will be a regular bhajan sessions at the person's home from 7:00 to 8:00 PM. (for some reason it has to be that time) In these sessions, family members sing bhajans which tell the Almighty to help the soul's journey to the next life, give peace to it, etc.

Janmastami And Kabir Jayanti

Bhakta families celebrate certain religious days with great love and devotion. Janmastami, the birth of Krishna, and Kabir Jayanti, the birth of Kabir, are celebrated each year. Bhaktas of all ages attend these gatherings. Janmastami is a whole day event. First about 11:00 AM to 2:00 pm, lunch is served. Approximately, a thousand to fifteen hundred people eat the carefully prepared vegetable curries, rice and various sweets. After the conclusion of lunch, a cultural program is held. Children dress up in customs and perform various skits of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. Most of the play deals with the early life of Krishna and his mischievous deeds. At about 6:00 PM, bhajan sessions known as satsangs begin. Only men do these types of prayers; women go to another place and do special dances around Krishna's pictures known as garbas. The satsang done by men is very distinctive. No other type of Hindu sect does these types of satsangs. Men sit in a half circle and sing bhajans with the accompaniment of only cymbal and tablas (type of drum). There is a gadi with a lighted diya at one end. These bhajans continue until midnight. At this time, a little cradle is brought and put by the gadi. A sculpture of the baby Krishna is rocked in the cradle while men sing bhajans. This signifies the birth of Krishna. Bhajans continue one or two hours after birth. (In India, bhajans continue until dawn.) After that, offerings are presented to Krishna; it can range from fruits, nut, or sweets. It is believed that he eats the offerings and makes them holy. As a result, they are distributed among the public. At this point, Janmastami comes to an end. Kabir Jayanti is also similar to Janmastami.

Overview

Presently, there are three Ramkabir Mandirs (temples) in India. Religious activities in the Los Angeles area take place in a Bhakta Cultural Center, Norwalk, CA hall and in Shree Ramkabir Mandir, city of Carson, CA. The Bhakta Samaj is always busy doing some type of activity. There are weekly classes held that teach young children our native language of Gujarati. Cultural shows, sports tournaments, picnics, and other recreational events take place also. The Bhakta Samaj is a highly exclusive and close-knit family. The population in the USA of the Bhakta Samaj is 4300 to 5000, (about 2200 in California), and about 15,000 worldwide. Despite the small population, Bhaktas have been very successful in preserving their Indian heritage away from home.

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Endnotes:

¹ Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of USA Publication Bhaktvani, January '94.

Sadguru Shree Kabir Saheb

Shree Dayarambhai Siterambhai Ramakabir
Manchester / U.S.A.

On the very auspicious Monday of Vickram Samvat 1456 Jayestha Shood Poonam, Niroo and Nimai, a childless Muslem couple previously known as Gouvarishnkar and Sarasvatidevi, found a bright, beautiful newborn baby lying on a large lotus flower in Lake Lahar of Kashi (Varanasi). They yearned for a child of their own and now with the grace of the almighty God their wish was granted, and they took him to their home.

An astrologer was called to name the child, however the child instantly told him his name was "Kabir." This couple, who were originally Hindu, were very pious, religious and knowledgeable.

They were forcibly converted to Islam, as were millions of other Hinds in Hindusthan, by the over-zealousness of the Moslem rulers to spread their religion. In order to save the Hinds from their cruelty, Sadguru Shree Kabir Saheb incarnated himself in a form of a Saint, although he himself was the Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent, one and only Supreme creator of all and everything as believed by many of his followers.

Shree Ramanand Swamiji, Saint of Kashi, was a very famous religious preacher. He had a disciple named Astanand who went to Lahar Talay. He arrived just before dawn, and after completing his morning rituals he sat for worship and meditation. At the time of sunrise he observed a brilliant incandescent light in the sky which was descending and ultimately settled on a large lotus flower. He was totally wonder-struck and could not decide what it was. He went to Gurudwar and passed the information to Ramanand. Ramanand immediately told him that a great savior of the Hindoos had come and this will be known in the next few days.

It was a tradition in those days to have a Guru (religious teacher) Swami Anantanand; a disciple of Ramanand, used to hold religious talks regularly. His meetings gradually became less popular since Kabir Saheb had started to hold his meetings. Many people were interested in his teachings and gradually he had more and more followers.

Anantanand because of jealousy asked Kabir to tell him the name of his guru. Kabir had no guru, and therefore decided to choose Ramanand. But Ramanand, being a devout Hindoo would not take Kabir as his disciple as he was a Moslem.

Before dawn, Kabir took form of a baby and lay on a step on the bank of the river Ganga, where Ramanand used to climb the steps regularly after bathing in Ganga. In the early morning darkness Ramanand did not see the baby and his foot touched the baby. The baby started to cry, and to quiet him, he spoke gently and lovingly the words, "Rama, Rama" which were accepted by Kabir as guru-mantra. Since then Kabir was regarded as one of the disciples of Ramanand who himself was a Vaishnavite of Lord Vishnu.

Kabir Saheb composed many devotional songs and used to preach the people of many faiths to worship "Rama" wholeheartedly, with true love, to live harmoniously and have compassion and respect for people of different beliefs and faiths.

Kabir took the form of a weaver of clothes and used to live simply on the earnings of clothes woven by him. He used to sing bhajans while weaving and many people used to come to listen to these divine songs. His fame reached far and wide, each day more and more people came to have his Darshan.

Unfortunately his teachings of humanity and religious tolerance in reference to the killings of Hindoos and the destruction of their temples were not likened by the Moslems such as the Sikander Lodi, the Emperor of Delhi and his chief minister Kazi Sheikh Taki, particularly by the latter. Sikander became very ill one day and no medicine could help him, so the wisemen of his court advised him to acquire the blessings of a Saint. The Emperor together with his prominent personnel went to Kashi to get the blessing of Ramanand. He refused to see him as he was a Moslem, so he asked his attendants about the other saint known as yogi Kabir. Kabir instantaneously appeared there with Sikander prostrated at his feet. Kabir Saheb gave his blessings and the incurable disease of Badshah (Emperor) disappeared.

Sikander brought his elephant and requested Kabir to sit in front, so that he could fan him. After coming to Delhi, he always made Kabir to sit on his diamond-studded golden throne and listened to his divine talks while sitting at his feet.

Kazi Sheikh Taki became very envious, and with some of his associates complained to the Emperor that Kabir had preached against Islam and regarded himself as Khuda. Sikander asked Kabir whether he was Almighty God, Kabir replied "I am the Almighty God". In order to test this, Sikander killed a cow and told Kabir to give it life again, which Kabir did. All the people realized that Kabir is the Almighty.

Sikander thereafter, always administered the divinity the prowess of Kabir Sahib and became kind and tolerant towards Hindoos and ordered the Moslems to allow the Hindoos to worship God as they pleased. After seeing Kabir passing through many tests such as elephant-test, water test, oil test, well test, fire test, sword test, cannon test, etc. and giving life to the dead bodies named Kamal and Kamali, Sikander and his court became the disciples of

Shree Kabir promising, not to hurt or kill anybody and to live peacefully with Hindoos and not to convert them to Islam.

Kabir traveled to many places and gave discourses on peace, harmony, unity, non-violence, love and respect for fellow human beings emphasizing that there is only one God.

In Gujarat, Kabir visited Siddhapur-Patan, Bharuch, Shukaltirth and on the island in Narmada River, he met two brothers Tatve and Jeeva who were ascetics and who had taken a vow that the water from washing of feet of a saint or sadhu that can make the dead branch of a bunyan tree grow again will become their Guru. They washed the feet of Kabir and Poured the water on the Planted dry branch. The branch soon came in to life and became the Great Bunyan Tree. Since then it has become to be known as Kabirvad. This is a very holy place for Ramakabir Panthees and they have built a temple at this Kabirvad island to mark this event. Since then many followers have frequently visited this holy place.

Gnaniji Maharaj who was the disciple of Khojiji Maharaj came to know the story of Kabir, and Tatva and Jeeva had decided to see Kabir at Shukaltirth, as he was in search of a spiritual guru. After dissolving all his doubts, Kabir gave him the knowledge of Rajayoga through which Gananiji acquired the self-realization and the union of Jiva and Brahmha (soul and universe soul). His followers are known as Ramakabir Panthaees.

After giving religious discourses and spiritual knowledge to the peoples in many parts of the world and performing miracles for the well being and benefits of the individuals as well as the communities, Kabir told his disciple Verrsindh Vaghela, the Maharaja of Varanasi that he has decided to visit Magahar, as his worldly deeds had been done and his purpose on earth had been fulfilled, so he wanted to return to the Satyalok from where he had gone.

Kabir came to Maghar (Uttar Pradesh) accompanied by Veersindh Vaghela (King of Veranasi), Ramsihn Vaghela (King of Reva), Bijlikhan Pathan (Nowab of Magahar), Mohammed Doula, the Nawab of Faizabad-Ayodhya and a great many bhaktas. There with his divine sight a river, which had been dry for many years, began to flow with cool fresh water. The river thereafter was known as the Ameer (nectar) River.

After speaking to them and advising them to follow the paths of Divine Knowledge and Bhakti (Divine Love), Kabir gave them the blessings and offerings of food (Prasad). He then returned to a hut and asked the door to be shut. A brilliant light appeared from the hut, loud thunder rang out, seen and heard by all his devotees as it moved up into the sky and slowly disappeared. Sadness fell over them; many began to weep as they realized what has happened.

The Hindoos and Moslems went into the hut, they found nobody. The two parties halved and flowers and bed sheets presented to Kabir by devotees. The Hindoos made a Samadhi (Monument) and the Moslems made a dargah

(tomb) nearby. The sadguru disappeared on Maagsar Shood Agiyaras of Vikram Samvat 1575. On this day every year a fair is held and devotees from many parts of the world visit this place and get inspirations from the teachings of Kabir.

The following are the main principles of the teaching of Kabir:

1. Satya-Truth
2. Ahinsa-Non-Violence
3. Ackata-Unity
4. Akeshwarvad-One God
5. Vishvabandhutva
6. International brotherhood

Kabir advised the following principles for Self-Realization-Spiritual progress ultimately leading to Sat-Chit-Anand-Truth, consciousness, bliss through Rajayoga.

1. Dhayan-Meditation
2. Dharana-Concentration on the universe soul
3. Samadhi-Union of soul with the universal soul. This can only be acquired by great zeal, perseverance and constant practice.

Courtesy: Kabirvani

Kabir Saheb: The only secular and rational saint of the medieval era

Prof. Raman Pathak 'Vachaspati (a rationalist writer, journalist)

Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

*Jogi hokar jata badhave
Hale mast rahita hai
Maan bhav hokar kale kapade
Dadhi-muchh mundata hai
Yun kya saheb milta hai?*

*Mulla ho kar baang pukare
Voh kya saheb behra hai?*

*Mala to manki bhali
Aur sansari bhekh,
Mala pahere man sukhi
To bobra ke ghar dekh!*

I have been inspired to consider Kabirji as the supreme and foremost saint of India with a rational and secularist approach. However, he cannot be literally called a rationalist in the present context of the term, because he is a believer of God, a preacher of Ram-nam, 'Shabda margi', a 'Guru-fakir'. Kabirji is a logical, reason-based thinker. He is a realist, pragmatic philosopher, who believes in life. He is against all external rituals performed for so-called religious satisfaction. Unlike Akho, our Gujarati rational, realist, devotional and philosophical poet, Kabir also bitterly criticizes material and illusive rituals and monkish attire. As a result, Kabir turns out to be a great social reformer also.

As Akho says:-

*"Katha suni suni futya kan,
Toye na aavyu Brahmajnan!"*

He has sharply criticized the outer pretentious behavior and allied attire of so-called saints. Can God be attained by removing the beard or mustache

or by growing long hair on the head? If renunciation or detachment can be achieved by wearing rosary, if it helps in attaining God, then go to the rosary shop, where numerous rosaries are hanging and you would have a direct vision of God! The rosary must be borne in mind, not only in the hands, to enable one to have a godly experience. This proves that Kabir Saheb is a logical rationalist, who traces the root and believes in the original, eternal element. At the same time, he is also a revolutionary reformer. Many of his bhajans-duha, reflect very strongly his secular attitude and belief in the equality of religions. He criticizes some Muslim rituals also. He says, 'O, Mulla, why do you offer your prayer (baang) so loudly? Is your Allah deaf? 'Khuda' or God is so omnipotent and omnipresent that He is able to listen to the sound of jingle-bells tied in the legs of ants."

Kabirji firmly believed that all living beings, including humans, are equal. 'Maya' or ignorance, creates differences among people, otherwise all religions are also equal. Kabir Saheb thinks beyond the superficial differences of all religions. In one of his 'duha' he says:

"I never favor a person or any specific religion, as I have no grudge or favoritism for anybody.

I consider all men equal and talk of the well being and benefit of the followers of all religions: "Sab jivan ke hit ki bhakhi." A child taking birth from a mother's womb has no religion. Thus, Kabirji could attain equanimity without any abnormality, even by staying amidst the worldly affairs. His equipoise condition was really secular and considered all religions equal.

Kabir Saheb was a rationalist and an intellectual of high stature. Let us see some illustrations. His contemporaries were hardly visible in articulating logical arguments as did Kabirji. Kabir Saheb could well be called an intellectual saint. He argues:

"If God is residing in the temples and Mosques only, then who is that vital consciousness prevailing in the entire universe? Brahmins observe fast on specific days and Kazis keep fast during Ramzan. Are God or Allah awakened on those days only and sleeping the rest of the days? Kabir is the child of Ram and Allah both. So, O! Devotee souls, you worship one God by reciting His name!"

Kabir never accepted the dividing systems of class or caste in Hindu religion. He said that all the external rituals like 'jap-tap', yoga, fast, etc. are useless, unless done with real inner experience of God. He preached equally to Hindus and Muslims so his followers were from both religions. Other religious saints also respected Kabirji for he had never hated, nor extolled anybody for religious means.

Courtesy: Kabirvani, February '03

The Prayaag of the Dawn

Bhagwatikumar Sharma, Surat

(An excellent writer, speaker and a celebrated journalist)

Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

I adore the time of the dawn the best. Sometimes I feel that the true period of my life begins with the early dawn as the sun settles in the east. I wait the next morning, then. In such a fine morning if I happen to listen to something, think or write something beautiful, it turns my pleasure double as a full-moon's glow pervades in the vassal of dawn.

My transistor has led me to pass through such experience for the last couple of days. Journalism is my profession but I am a man of literature at heart. Radio provides me both the opportunities - I enjoy its news bulletins everyday, so as the programs of literature. The Aakashvani Hindi news readers - Sochani Asthana, Chandrika Joshi or Bimalendu Pandey are my never missing morning companions. I woke up at five and moved my fingers on the transistor's knob to locate an interesting broadcast during that hour. In this effort, I got a habit of listening to the Marathi programs of Mumbai, 'B', which starts earlier in the morning. Its 'Chintan' series attracted me very much. It made me more familiar with the Marathi language also. It presents the contemplative writings of famous Marathi authors, like Vijaya Rajadhyal or Chandrakant Bandivadekar and many others. Sometimes the writers present their thoughts by themselves or sometimes the Aakashvani readers read it. Megha Kulkarni is one of my favorite Marathi Aakashvani readers, with her perfect and proper pronunciation, accent etc. Her melodious sound ameliorates not only my morning but the entire day!

Once, when I tuned to Mumbai 'B' station on the radio, the 'Chintan' had already started, so I missed the announcer's name, but the voice was so familiar and had a scholarly touch in the language. At the end of the discourse the name announced was Mangesh Pangaonkar. It illuminated my heart of course he could be nobody but Mangesh Padgaonkar! An unparalleled perfection of art of vocal presentation!

Why am I happy about it? It is because Mangeshbhai presented 'Kabirvani' on the Akashvani. It was as if flavor added to Gold. The next day also the same experience. 'Kabirvani' 'Chintan' series by Mangesh Padgaonkar. It

was rebroadcast every evening also. It would be a bowl of elixir to those who have been tortured by the boring programs of cable T.V.

This series has included some aspects of Kabirji's personality and his works. He asserted that Kabir might have presented his bhajans by reciting them for his own pleasure. They gave more joy and preaching to the listeners. I have been besieged by remorse of not having audio-visual means in the days of Kabir.

When we feel the depth of Kabir's poetry through Mangesh's vision, our sense of appreciation gets doubled. Kabir did not believe that there is no God, but his approach was totally different from those of so-called devotees. He had no quarrel with God, but had many differences of opinion with his devotees. The idol-worship, namaaz, Kaba-kashi, Bhajan-kirtan, azaan-baang, rosary, beads etc. is his butt of irony as the so-called devotees use them to attain God. On listening to Mullah's 'azaan' to awaken the Allah at a high pitch, Kabirji immediately spoke truthfully:

"O, Mulla! Why do you pray to God in such a loud noise? 'My Lord' could listen to the sound of 'nupur' if fitted in the legs of an ant. Then, why can't your silent prayer be heard by Him?"

We also play large musical instruments and create unbearable noise at 'Bhajan Kiratan' on festivals to please God, but it disturbs the peace of others. Let these words of Kabir reach us and we follow it to make this world peaceful and to enable us to listen to the music of the legs of ants. If we could do so, our sensitivity could be universal.

Mangeshbhai also dealt with Kabir's concern for Hindu-Muslim unity. He delineated with examples-Kabir's unillusioned vision of Life and world, his deep faith in God behind the external meaninglessness of the things, his detachment to worldly affairs even with their proper knowledge etc. It explores Kabir's art of poetry before the audience.

Courtesy: Kabirvani, January '99

Our Spiritual Heritage, 'Kahein Kabir' — Thus Spake Kabir

Prof. Dr. Bholabhai Patel, M.A., Ph.D.
(Ret. Head, Dept. of Hindi, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad)
Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

In 1913, the Nobel Prize, showered an overnight glory upon Rabindranath Tagore for his 'Geetanjali'. The work was highly received by the entire world and many translation of it came out in various languages. 'Geetanjali' predominantly contains Bhakti verses. Some of the western scholars found an impact of Christian religion on him. In fact, Geetanjali is born out of Tagore's personal spiritual vision. However, it has the shades of Indian philosophical traditions of the Upanishada, the Vaishnav tradition, medieval Bowel saints' tradition and so on. Tagore had no need to go to the Chistian religion. But how to defend those Western scholars? How to convince them that it was not Christian, but is the glorious tradition of our own country.

Instead of a direct and stern conflict and defense, Tagore translated one hundred poems of Kabirji from four volumes of 'Kabir' by his close associate of Shantiniketan, Acharya Kshitimohan Sen and got it published from the very MacMillan in 1916. He intended to suggest by this, that Geetanjali has been benefited by the heritage of saints like Kabir.

Ezra Pound, an English poet, who has a lion-share in popularizing Kabir's poetry on the international scale, also remarked :

"Why did he (Tagore) translate Kabir, how who will read him?"

This shows that there was a great influence of mystic saints like Kabir Saheb on Geetanjali, but it can be said after five hundred years also that Kabir's poems could be contemporary of Tagore's Geetanjali and it could touch the heart of a highbrow western critic and poet like Ezra Pound. It's not strange that it touches us.

Historically speaking Kabir's time was that of approximately six hundred years ago, it was so because the details of life and place of birth etc. of many medieval saints like Kabir are not authentically found. The tradition of Kabirpanth and the search of researchers may vary, but it could certainly be said that no decisive and exact fact is available about Kabir's life and year or date of birth.

"To ask about Kabir's caste is to refute his message of life. He did not believe in caste discrimination and tried to uproot it from society very harshly. He says all the castes are equal, in one of his 'Sakhis':

*"Jati na puchho sadhu ki, Puchhi lijiye jnan,
Mol karo tarwar ka, Pada raban do myan."*

Caste is only an outer cover, a scathe to a sword. Which may be very beautiful, but the important thing is the sword. The saint's spiritual knowledge is of real worth, it is immaterial whatever caste he may belong to. Not only Kabir, but many medieval saints have preached like him. In the medieval era, many saints have come up from the so-called lower castes, as if the dominance of Brahmin tradition has overthrown. So one should not ask the caste of a saint. Kabir says:

*Santan jat na puchho nirgunia,
Sadhu Brahmin, sadhu chatari, sadhu jat baniya
Sadhanme chhattis kom hai, Tedhi tor puchaniya
Sadhe nau sadhe dhobi, Sadh jati hai bariya
Sadhanma Raidas sant hai, Supachrushi so bhangiya,
Hindu-tark dui din bane hai, Kachu nahi pahachaniya."*

Here Kabirji replies to those who ask the caste of a saint, that there are thirty six castes in the saints. Your question is out of place. One doesn't know anything who asks the castes of the Hindu or the Muslims.

Kabir presents this in an aggressive tongue also. He asks the high caste Brahmin:

*Jo tu Brahman, Brahmani jayo,
Aan varse kyon na aayo?*

O, Brahmin, if you are born by a brahmin woman, you are just like a common man. Why have you not born through another way than that of a mother's womb?

However if Kabir is to be identified by a specific caste, which caste he should be classified in? Was he a Muslim? Replies to such questions are not easy to get. His entire works also put a researcher in dilemma. He was born of a Brahmin virgin widow and brought up in a Muslim weaver family, as if a middle path is found out. The Kabir panthi believes that Kabir was an incarnation, he was not born as an ordinary human being, but he was incarnated.

But it is clear that Kabir was brought up by Niru and Nima in a Muslim weaver family. In the medieval era, a large section of lower caste people have

accepted Islam, sometimes by force, by greed or sometimes voluntarily. The ancestors of Kabir also may be the Hindus, it could be guessed. It is seen in his tradition.

Kabirji's place of birth may be controversial, but he has spent most of his life in Kashi, an abode of all religions. Kashi, has been a religious centre of Indian culture since ancient times. It was so in the medieval era. Numerous saints, preachers, devotees had been associated with Kashi. It is believed to be 'Moksha-puri' the place of salvation. One who dies in Kashi, directly achieves 'moksha' attains salvation, so number of people at the end of their lives go to Kashi. However, Kashi is the place of Vishwanath, but ironically it is also called:

"a city of dying and deads."

But Kabirji did not want salvation which could be attained after death in Kashi. It was a blind faith according to him. He says a bit differently that if I am to attain salvation, on my death in Kashi, then who would have faith on Ram, whose godly name, I worshipped through out my life? I am bound to get salvation, wherever I die, it is due to my devotion to Lord Ram. So in the final phase of his life he went to Magahar, from where the person goes to hell after death. Kabir refuted this belief by his behaviors and preaching. He says:

*Loka mati ke bhora re,
Jo Kashi tan tajai Kabira,
To Ramabi kaha nihora re!*

Kabir is a unique saint of Bhakti movement in the medieval era, Hazari Prasad Trivedi, one of the scholars on Kabir has said that there is no one like Kabir, in the history of Hindi literature of one thousand years. Of course Tulsidas is there but Kabir enjoys distinct position. There are two main streams of 'Bhakti Sahitya' during medieval age in the entire central Hindi belt:

- (1) Saguna Bhakti poetry (2) Nirguna Bhakti poetry

The first stream, Saguna Bhakti poetry, is further divided into two branches

- (1) Ram-based sagun bhakti poetry (2) Krishna-based sagun bhakti poetry

Tulsidas, the writer of Ramcharit manas, is the principal poet of Ram-based sagun bhakti poetry, and Surdas, the composer of Sursagar is the main poet of Krishna-based sagun bhakti poetry. He was followed by Nandadas. Krishnadas. The poets of Vallabh creed, Meera, Raskhan etc.

Nirguna Bhakti poetry is also divided into two branches:

- (1) Knowledge-based Nirguna Bhakti poetry
- (2) Love-based Sufi Bhakti poetry

Kabir is the representative poet of knowledge-based Nirguna poetry, whereas representative poet of love-based sufi bhakti poetry. Sufi poetry could be called a branch of Islam. The Sufi got more Hindu followers with their behavior and works. Jayasi composed 'Padmavat' in Doha and Chopai (the couplets) from Hindu themes. He was the precursor of Tulsidas in the use of doha-chopai in Avadhi language.

But in addition to this, the composer of 'Git-Govind', Jaydeva, launched a tradition of Krushna poets in vraj-dialect, which was followed by Vidyapati, the Maithil-kokil poet and Chandidas etc. in the eastern India. Chaitanya's incarnation in the eastern India is also a dominant event in the religious regeneration. Chaitanya is the vital pivot of Gaudi Vaishnav poetry.

In the north-eastern region of India Shankerdev and Madhavdev established Vaishnav creed in Asam, revived Bhagwat and formed 'nam-ghar' (a religious centre) in every village and created a strong religious solidarity, the tradition of which is alive in Asam even today.

Narsinh Mehta born in Gujarat, but his Krishna-poetry has not reached much in various states of our country. Narsinh Mehta was a poet of par excellence. He was followed by Akho and many other devotional poets. In Maharashtra Jananeshwar, Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram led this Bhakti movement of poetry.

But where and what is the epicenter of this Bhakti movement of poetry? Many scholars believe that as the spread of Islam and reign of the Muslims took place in India, the defeated Hindus began to succumb to religion. Shri Ramchandra Shukla, the writer of 'The History of Hindi Literature' and many scholars support this, but Hazari Prasad Dwivedi quotes Indian philosophy and says:

"I would emphatically like to say that had Islam not come to our country, even then, our Bhakti literature would have remained complete as it is today."

Whatever the case may be, but this medieval Bhakti movement has molded and revived our social life significantly. Umashanker Joshi says:

"The saints and preachers dwell in the core of our medieval history. The cultural soul of India has been manifested in saintly poetry in various Indian languages. The tide of Bhakti, during this period, has sustained the tattered Hindu religion and invigorated it against the mighty arrival of Islam in our country."

Where does Kabir stand in this tradition of saints and devotees? He belongs to the Yogic tradition of Naath-siddha. He has also awakened his

'kundalini power' and heard 'anahat naad'. He has also propagated the name of nirguna 'Ram'. His Guru Ramanand has given him 'Nam diksha'. Ramananda was an important saint in the medieval era. He had brought the Bhakti movement to the south, the land of the Bhagwat.

*"Bhakti dravid upaji, laaye Ramanand,
Prakat kiya Kabirne, sapta dwip nav khand."*

Once Ramanand was going to the Ganga-ghat for bath early in the morning along with his disciples and his feet touched some one's body lying on the steps of the 'ghat'. Ramananda exclaimed, 'Ram nam kah', (say Ram). The person lying on the ghat was no one else but Kabirji. Who has got the 'diksha' of 'Ram nam' from Ramananda. Even if we don't give importance to this legend many researchers believe that young Kabir might have become the disciple of Ramananda at his ripe age. It is also said that 'Kashimein hum pragat bhaye hai Ramanand chitae." But Charlotte Vaudeville, a French scholar of Hindi literature, who has studied both Tulsidas and Kabir, has a different opinion.

In a book titled "A Weaver Named Kabir" (1993), she asserts that Kabir was neither a Ramanandi, nor was he baptized by his so-called guru Ramananda. She has also written that Kabir had not left his home to become a 'Vairagi'.

Kabir earned his livelihood by weaving the cloth and selling it, but he had never bothered much to sustain his family. In one of his sakhis he says:

*"Sai itana dijiye, Jame kutumb samay,
Mein bhi bhukha na rabu, Sadhu na bhukha jaay."*

He has never craved for economic saving. It has been said that he had sent his wife to the money lender to maintain hospitality.

*"Pani badhe naavmain
Ghar mein badhe daan,
Dono bath ulechiye,
Yahi sayano kaam."*

Kabir inherited a sort of stubbornness or sternness from saharpa siddha or Gorakhnath. So his ancestral 'hatha-yogis' has also written in volcanic words, like that of our Akho, devotional poet, against idol-worship, pretension, touchability and such socio-religious vices, vigorously attacks, but some part of his writing is destructive. The Pundits, Kaji, Mulla, Avadhut all are his butt of irony and sarcasm. Kabir also realized their limitations, on observing the pretentious behavior of the Hindus and the Muslims Kabirji has said:

*"Are in dunu raah na pai
Hindu apani kare badai gagar chhuna na dei
Vaishya ke payantar sovei yeh dekho Hinduai.
Musalman ke peer-aulia murga-murgi khai
Khala keri beti byahai gharahi mein kare sagai
Hindu ki Hinduvai dekhi, Turkan ki Turkai
Kabai Kabir suno bhai sadho, Kaun raanh hyei jai."*

Kabir says those Hindus and Muslims are bewildered who pay much heed to external rites and rituals only, they have not found the right track of religion. How can such a Kabir be in good terms with the so-called Pundits ? He asks the Pundit:

*Tera mera manua kaisa ik hoi re
Mein kahta haun aankhin dekhi
Tu kahta kagad ki dekhi
Mein kahta surzavanhari,
Tu rakhyo urzai re
Mein kahta tu jaagat rahiyo,
Tu rahta bei soi re
Mein kehta nirmohi rahiyo,
To jata hai mohi re."*

Kabir stressed the humanitarian approach. Human life of virtue is his prime concern. (This is one aspect his ideology, but deeply viewing Kabirji was a mystic saint and devotee.). He considers all men as equal from humanitarian point of view. He says that taking birth in a high caste, does not guarantee the excellent human being. One has to perform excellent deeds for the same. The Hindu by idol-worshipping and the Muslim (Turka) by Haj-pilgrim can't achieve anything throughout life. Instead Kabirji preaches to follow the path of love and brotherhood. He stresses the honesty and sincerity of a person. A true Hindu or a Muslim is he who:

"Jiska durust rahai imaan."

In some couplets Kabirji has plainly defined the humanitarian religion:

*"Jo toko kanta bovei, Tahi bov tu phul,
To ko phul ke phul hai, Vako hai tirshul."*

Offer a flower to those who spread thorns on your way. You would have that flower, but by repentance your flower would turn a trishul for him.

So Kabir has suggested learning the two and a half letters of the word 'Prem' (Love).

*"Potbi padbi padbi jag muva,
Pundit bhaya na koi,
Dhai akshar prem ka padhe so pundit boi."*

Mere reading of scriptures would not confer you knowledge and make you Pundit, but only by grasping the philosophy of love and brotherhood, you would be a true Pundit.

This love of affection is vividly reflected in one of his poems: "Ghunghat ka pat khol re tohe piya milenge." If you remove your veil you would attain or be able to see your 'beloved' God. Metaphorically it appeals to remove the veil of 'maya'. God resides in every human being, so one should not use harsh words for any one. It would harm the God within him.

*"Ghunghat ka pat khol re, Toko piya milenge,
Ghat ghat mein vah sai ramta, Katuk vachan mat bol re."*

The fourth poem of Tagore's 'Geetanjali' reflects this notion beautifully:

"Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my Limbs... I shall ever try to drive all evils."

Tagore has said in one of his poems:

"O, my dear God, I observe during day and night that you are all pervading. I yearn for you. This yearning or separation from God is named as 'King' by Kabir.

*"Biraha biraha mat kahou
Biraha hai sultan
Ja ghat biraha na sanchare
Ta ghat jan mashan."*

The feeling of separation is like a king, a king of kings. The heart which does not experience such a feeling is not a heart, but a crematorium.

This feeling of separation could be well experienced after the ecstasy of meeting with the beloved, i.e. God, such an apex sense of pleasure is expressed in many of his poems and couplets:

*"Kabira pyala premka Antar diya lagay
Rom rom mein rami rahya Aur amal kya khay?"*

Of course, this glass is of 'love for the God. (Hari-rasa)

*Hari-rasa piya jaaniye,
Je kab hun na jaai khumar."*

'Hari-rasa' (devotion to God). Its taste does not leave you.

This love of God is also known as 'mysticism', where the devotee yearns for God and in His search leaves everything behind. Ultimately he attains Him and gets absorbed in Him. This dialogue between Atma-Parmaatma, lover beloved, bride-bridegroom is well expressed in his poems.

*Nisadin salei ghav, Nind aavei nabin
Piya milan ki aash, Teihar bhavai nabin."*

In one of his sakhis he says: "O beloved, once you be in my eyes, and as soon as you are in, I would shut my eye-lids. Then onwards, I would see nobody, and would not allow anyone to see you also.

The sense of jealousy, natural to lovers, is expressed with sweetness.

*"Naina antari aav tun, Jyun hon nain zankheu,
Na hon dekhu aurku, Na tuz dekhan deun."*

Kabir frequently changes the meaning in love-poems. The bride has to go to the place of her in-laws, it is sure and certain, then why to cry and sing and seek excuses? The place of bride-groom is her ultimate abode. In the last line the meaning changes, you see the same here:

*"Dulhini tohi piya ke ghar jana
Kahe rovo, kahe gaavo,
Kahe karat bahana
Kahe pahiyo hari hari churiyan
Pohiyo prem ka bana,
Kahei kabir suno bhai sadho,
Bin piya nahi thikana."*

The same sense is mirrored in another couplet:

*"Karle singar chatur albeli
Sajan ke ghar jaana hoga
Nahale dhole sis guntha le
Phir vahanse nahi aana hoga."*

It is true that a bride has to adore herself while going to her in-laws place, but she has not to return from there carries a Kabir-touch. If we think for a while it becomes clear in our mind.

(Many of the quotations in this article are taken from 'Kabir' by Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, or from my personal memory. I have not tallied them with the original source. Some of the points have been discussed in my other articles as well.)

Courtesy: Adopted from Akhand Anand, July-Aug.'99.

Practice Your Innocent Belief by Abandoning Craft and Cunningness

Chidananda: Makarand Dave
Translation: Dr. Chaitanya Desai

When saintly devotees like Sarahpad and Kabir preach to follow tender path or neutral way, they simply mean: you leave your crafty nature, trickery or so-called skill to deceive others and practice what grows within you. Let your heart speak and let your limbs perform what you speak. This is a very simple and clear path. It is therefore, the shortest way to reach truth and bliss. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Who ever follows such straightforwardness in action and truthfulness, nobody would point out any fault in him. Kabirji has said:

*"Lena dena sohara, Je dil sancho hoi,
Us change deewan mai, Pala na pakde koi."*

Whoever is fair and just in any dealing and truthful at heart, his way to heaven or God is uninterrupted. However disorder or chaos we may sometimes find and feel superficially in the worldly matters, but there is some hidden authority, invisible power which keeps everything in accordance. Even the smallest incident is taken into His consideration. The stable law of 'Karma' prevails here and nobody can be escaped from it. We believe that the present life is not the only one and separate for one birth only. The soul changes body, birth by birth. He dwells within us and records everything, notes the eternal time and takes the reward. He can enjoy the bliss whose mind is pure, whose dealings are fair. There fore, keeping the mind pure and stable carries great importance. This purity, serenity, stability of mind is not possible without the base of sincere and honest life. Kabir added devotion to God to this stability and strengthened it. An Yogi's determination when clubs with the interest of Bhakti, it attains the unity of nothingness and compassion. On practicing purification of mind it gradually gets detached and remains unperturbed even if busy in activities of all senses. Sarah says:

*"Dekhabu sunhu paisahu swadahu, Sunghau, bhramahu, baithahu,
uththahu, Aalmaal vyavahare pelluhu, Man chhadi ekakar na challahu."*

(We should not let our mind blow or get attached to the subjects of the senses while seeing, listening, speaking, testing, smelling, walking, sleeping, awakening and so on...) Yogi Gorakhnath has also said to be careful in not sticking the mind with any action:

*"Hasiba, kheliba, gahiba geet
Didh kari rakhi apana chitta
Hasai khelei na kare manbhang
Te nihchal sada nath ke sang."*

Keep your mind stable. While laughing, playing or singing. Don't get your mind disturbed, you control your instincts and always be with Lord Shiva.

Kabir says the same in a different manner:

*"Sadho, sabaj samadhi bhali,
Sai te milen bhayo ja din,
Tein, surati na anat chali,
Jaban jaban jau soi parikarma,
Jo kachhu karu so seva,
Jab sou tab karu dandvat,
Puja aur na deva,
Sabad nirantar manua rate
Malin bachan ko tyagi,
Uthar beithat kabahu na bisarei
Eisi tari laagi."*

Another poet, Ravi saheb sang:

*"Uthta, besata, basta, ramata,
Dindin adhik saneh,
Trividh tap shamya mara tanma
Amrut vothya meh,
Eva have nahi jai re,
Vahete pur vahya."*

Why does man suffer from three types of agony? His senses drag him to the flood of instinctive subjects. His mind and intellect blows in the passion of immediate gain. Man's soul always yearns to keep his independence and self Pleasure intact. This creates disharmony within him, which exhibits anywhere in the form of a disease. So to keep oneself healthy-mentally and physically one should know and follow the law of Karma and lead life accordingly.

Our scriptures from 'Ishavashyam' have tried to preach us that God is omnipresent, so don't try to snatch any thing from anybody. If your senses drag you, mind goes out of control and you have been baffled to take a suitable step in the dark, then closing the eyes won't let there any light. On the contrary, you would sink into double darkness. So learn the scheme of detaching your mind with whatever you do. The saints have shown us the ways to achieve this. Sarah, Gorakh, Kabir or Ravi saheb have inspired us and the Bhagwad Gita has shown us the vision of an 'emancipated soul.'

*"Naiva kinchit karomiti yukto,
Manyet tatvavita,
Pashyanshrunva srushajdran
Annangachachhan swaph, swasan,
Pralapanvisrujan gruhanan
Unmish an nimish annapi
Insriyani, indriyartheshu vartant
Iti dharyan."*

A man with philosophical vision always thinks that he is not doing anything, as his senses are under his control while doing all the activities like seeing, listening, touching, smelling, eating, helping, breathing, talking, coming, going etc.

Courtesy: Adopted from his book, Makarand Mundra. Gujarat Times, New York.

The Revolutionary Saint Pious Kabir

Dr. Abbasali Tai

Translated by Manohar S. Patel, C.P.A., McAllen, TX

In the fifteenth century, the Hindu religion was infested with hypocrisy, favoritism, and oppression. All those negative forces resulted in the division of religion into many sects. The country was under the rule of invaders: the rulers were oppressive; the State rulers were always engaged in envy and war. The low caste people were living in a pathetic condition.

Believers in Ram, Krushna, and Shiv had irreconcilable differences.

The birth of Bhakta Kabir, during this time of turmoil and turbulence was a miraculous event. He was born to a Brahman family, but the mother abandoned him near Lahartara Lake. He was then adopted and raised by Nima and Niru who belonged to the weaver community.

*Chuti ke pag nevar baaje wah bhi sahib sunta hai,
Pundit hoi ke assan mare lambi mala japta hai,
Antar tere kaptakatarni wah bhi sahib lakhata hai.*

It was impossible for a person of a lower caste to write such a satire in those days, but Bhakta Kabir had the moral courage to do so. He was illiterate, he could not write, but his Atmagyan (Knowledge of one's self, i.e. Atma) took a form of a poem. It has the synopsis of Upanishad and Vedant.

All religions have their own traditions and rituals. Outwardly, they all look different, but inwardly, all of them have exactly the same element. From a golden nugget, we can make a bangle, necklace or a ring. The shape and the size are different, but they are all made from the same nugget of gold. They may look different, but they are not. In the same way, all religion teaches us to be one with God. Religions are different, but the teachings are the same.

Kabir Sahab undertook a crusade to bring about the religious harmony by erasing the differences between the various sects.

A person's value is evaluated during the turbulent times of the history. Lincoln is known for his success in abolishing slave tradition. Mahatma Gandhi has a very special place in world history because he liberated India from British Raj without firing a single bullet. Bhakta Kabir has the honor of uniting the numerous sects of Hindu dharma. He has followers from a wide range of caste

and creed. The notable among them are Guru Nanak, Dadu Dayal, Mandev (Tailor), Nabhadas (dom), Malukdas (Bania), Raidas (Butcher).

Mahatma Gandhi had the influence of the philosophy of Kabir Saheb. He fought apartheid, he lifted the status of the oppressed and he tried to abolish the differences between upper and lower castes. He was following the preaching of Kabir Saheb.

I have taught the Sakhis of Kabir Saheb to the students doing M.A. Prof. Govind Trigunapat and Dr. Sharnam Sing Sharma have done Ph.D. One of the low caste students, Dr. Ramji Macwana, has done Ph.D. under my guidance on the subject of Kabir and Akho.

The philosophy of Kabir Saheb is eternal and depicts the truth very boldly.

Courtesy: Adopted and compiled from Kabirvani magazine January, '05

Saint Kabir, Gujarat and Bharat: One Short Reflection

Prof. Jayant Pathak, Nanpura

Translated by Manohar S. Patel, C.P.A., McAllen, TX

*Ab hum jaana ho Hari baji ka khel,
Dunk bajay dekhay tamasha buhari so let sakel,
Hari baji sur nar muni juhn de,
Maya chetak laya
Ghar me dari saban bharmaya,
Hrudaye gyan na aaya,
Baji juth bajigar sancha
Sadhun ki mati aisi
Kabai kabir ji jaisi samazi,
Taki gati bhai taisi.*

Hindu Poetry in the Middle Ages was divided into two streams: Gyan (knowledge) and Bhakti (devotion). Many smaller streams also flow into these two main streams. Our saints have explained the Elements of Bhakti Marg and Gyan Marg in simple language, for the benefit of society. They have kept alive the teachings of Ved and Upanishad.

Akho has a special place in teachings of Gyan Marg. His mantra is Atma ni suz (self realization). Kabir Saheb also supports this element and unveils the divine meaning of what is atma, param-atma, jiv (life) the influence of Maya (attachments) on human behavior. Not only does he explain these phenomena, but he also supports them with the divine experiences he had in his life. He has not only experienced this divinity, but has seen it with his naked eye just the way one sees Amulu (a sour fruit) in the palm of the hand (hastaamal kavat). We call such experiences the offerings of the third eye (agnya charka). This is what is called the Self Realization. In this dark age (kali yug), his teachings act like a beacon and gives us guidance as to the purpose of this manav avtar (human life).

The Shankar Vedant is the theme adopted by Gyan Marg Poets. The basic principle of Shankar Vedant is "Brahm is eternal (akshar), World is destructible (kshar)." This is not easy to digest because we are totally engrossed

in an illusion and we are not willing to believe that this world is nothing but a mirage; it is full of elements of Maya. In simple language, these poets have compared the world with our dreams. In a dream, we see many things, but when we wake up, they are all gone. Not a single thing we saw in our dream exists. They were not sat (eternal), there were a-sat (destructible or a mirage). This is the message they give to the human race. What is maya (attachments)? It is a veil between sat and a-sat.

In this Sakhi, Kabirji compares maya with an act of a magician. This magician believes that this act is the creation of God, so he is not able to grasp the principle of sat and a-sat. Only the saints know that the act (maya) is false, but the actor (Ishwar) is Real. With shastra gyan (bookish knowledge), we can understand this difference. But to experience this difference, one must become a saint. Saintliness means avoidance of worldly desires and relentless effort to realize the self (be an introvert, not an extrovert). The last line of the Sakhi has deep meaning. Kabirji says the show of the God is very complex and the human either becomes maya tit (filled with desires) or maya-rahit (no desires), according to how he interprets the show of the God.

The charm of Akha and Kabir is that they explain very complex theories of life in a very simple language with examples and similes so even a person with ordinary prudence can grasp the meaning of these complexities.

(Courtesy: Adopted and compiled from Kabirvani magazine, '91)

Vase of Ram's Nectar: The Drinker (Enjoyer) of Each and Every Drop

Dr. Niranjana Rajyaguru

Translated by Manohar S. Patel, C.P.A., McAllen, TX

The name of Kabir Saheb is forever revered by all Saints. His teachings have overcome all barriers of languages and are recognized as an eternal truth. He was a merchant of shabad (word) and the shabad was "Sat."

*Hum vasi us desh ke, jaha jati varan kuchh nahi,
Shabad milva ho raha, deh milava naahi,
Sahebka ghar shikhar pur, jaha silbil gail,
Paw na take pipilika, waha pundit lade bel.*

In this Sakhi, Kabir Saheb gives the introduction of Param-Tatva (param-atma).

He says param-tatva's house is on top of a mountain and the path to his house is as narrow as the thread of a web of a spider. Even an ant could not take a step on that narrow path. With their bookish knowledge, the Pundits, Scholars, Shashtris try to reach the top of this slippery path. When an ant cannot walk on this path, how can these Pundits full of arrogance and pride? They stagger and fall down.

Kabir Saheb has written some unique Sakhis in which he addresses himself. He conveys the gist of his experiences by talking to himself time and time again. He writes Hu (I) when he wants to portray humans, and tu (you) to portray Param-atma. While discoursing with Sadhus and Avdhuts, he explains the fine difference between Jiv (life), Jagat (world), Maya (attachments) and Brahm (Param-Tatva). The listeners of this deep subject are Avadhuts, and listeners of Kayashodhan, Ashtang-yog, shat-chakra, panchi-karan and Mudras are Jogis who want to learn about Sadhna (seekers of Param-Tatva).

*Agni ju laggi nirme, kandu jaliya zari,
Uttar dakhhan ke pandita rahe vichri*

Sadguru Kabir Sahib, in this Sakhi, says when a fire of Gyan (knowledge) and Vairagya (detachment) burns, the impurities like Kam (ambitions), Krodh (anger), Moh (illusion), ADEKHA (envy), and Lobh (greed), etc., burn to the ashes and the pure atma glows in its majestic glory. The Pundits are left pondering how this could happen and they are not able to fathom this divine mystery.

Paramatma has created this world full of distractions and the experience of kshar, meeting the akshar, cannot be described in words; they can only be experienced. Can we explain the form and size of fragrance? No. We can only experience it. It is the same for divine experience. The only language capable of reaching this experience is language of love (anurag). This is the experience beyond the boundaries of Man, Buddha, and Body, and it cannot be explained by Vidya, Gyan, or Logic.

*Hay santo! Dhoka kansu Dhariye!
Gun me nirgun, nirgun me gun,
Wat chhandi kyu bahiye! santo dbokha*

When we know sagun is nirguna and nirgun is sagun, all the controversies come to an end. Shashtra, pothi, kaji, kuran are nothing but the maze of words; and if one gets entangled in his maze; one cannot attain a divine experience. "Kasturi kundal base, mrug dhunde ban mahi." The deer carries musk in its navel. When it grazes, the grass gets the fragrance of musk. The deer thinks the musk is in the grass and roams the whole forest to look for it. The poor thing does not know the musk is in its navel. Kabir Saheb suggests that we be introverts rather than extroverts. The Divine element is within us; we do not have to look outside. Replicate the good things sadguru teaches us, be one with it, have complete faith in it, stay aware of it day in and day out, and then what you will experience, words would not be able to describe.

(Courtesy: Adopted and compiled from Kabirvani magazine January, '03)

The Words (Messages) of the Saint and Public Education

Dr. Nathalal Gohil

Translated by Manohar S. Patel, C.P.A., McAllen, TX

*Sadbudani vaani me saday mukh jaani
Bavo bole ven par vani mara harijan
Pio prem ras jaani Bhervanath*

The sermon of Sadhus is the sacred lecture to be understood and to be listened in his presence, because it is the language of his divine experience. It is beyond the language of our 52 letters of the alphabet, the language we do speak in a day-to-day life. Our dictionaries would not be able to give the real meaning of the words he speaks. When we worship the inner soul with the help of the sant-vaani, all our desires burn down and the mind stays focused on our aim, which is to realize the self.

In our Hindu spiritual world, sant-vani is like the flowing waters of river Ganga, always pure, pious and calm. Whenever a saint or a seeker has a divine experience of param-atma, he is not able to hide his bliss; and when he describes it through his words, it becomes sant-vani. His words are connected with surata (atma). A spoken word not connected with surata is a word spoken by mouth (Vaikhari vaani). When Vaikhari vaani becomes para vaani, then it becomes sant-vaani.

Sant shiromani Kabir Saheb recommends shabd-surat-yog sadhna.

*Aadbi sakhi Kabir ki, koti grunth hari jjan,
Satya nam, jag jhut hai, surati shabd pabechan.*

So long as Surati is absorbed in outward attachments, no one will know who one is (nijrup). The amalgamation of Surati with shabd brahm is yog sadhana. In the process of uniting Surati with Nirati, Kabir Saheb does not give any importance to hath-yog. He gives importance to the devotion through man. In this process, man becomes calm and gets focused on tri-kuti. When we chant the mahamantra given by our guru in a rhythm with our breathing and after a while when it gets connected with Surati, it is called kriya-yog. This is a priceless state of mind. The sadhak becomes devoid of worldly attachments

and gets a vision of Brahm swarup. He experiences a bliss, which words cannot describe. Saints spread this bliss via sant-vani. It is not only to be sung or heard, but it has to be constantly recited. That is why it is called Bhajan.

Sant-vani is the force that nourishes the samaj (society). Some people believe that this earth rotates in orbit according to the Principle of Newton or is based on the mood of the Shesh-naag. But the author firmly believes it is held in orbit by the penance of the Saints.

History proves that whenever evil forces become strong and defeat divine forces, a Saint is born to destroy those evil forces and bring the divine forces back in command. This is the importance of Saints and the world is always grateful for the work they do for the benefit of the human race.

The Saints have lived with the society, fulfilled the responsibility as household heads, and have roamed the places. Raidas was a butcher; Kabir Saheb was a weaver. They were living with a family, but always stayed aloof; the maya never attracted or conquered them.

(Courtesy: Adopted and compiled from Kabirvani magazine January, '04)

Saint Kabir, Gujarat and Bharat: A Short Thought

Prof. Natvarlal Kuberdas Pandya (Usnas)
Translated by Manohar S. Patel, C.P.A., McAllen, TX

In our Hindu literature and in our life, two streams of spiritual philosophy are very prominent sagun and nirgun. In the stream of nirgun bhakti, the name of Saint Kabir is very prominent. He was born in Kashi around 1358-1518. Though born in a Hindu family, Saint Kabir was raised in a Muslim family. When he passed away, his body was transformed into flowers for performing his last rites, which were compatible with both Hindu and Muslim beliefs. By maintaining a balance between the Muslim belief of one God and Hindu philosophy of nirgun-vad, in his sakhis, Saint Kabir has weaved a composite and unique cloth combining both cultures and beliefs.

During Muslim rule, north Hindustan gave us notable saint poets like Guru Nanak, Kabir, Raidas, Dadu and Pran-nath. But the best of all, and beyond any doubt, is Kabir. His contribution to Hindu philosophy is unsurpassed.

The Hindu religion will prevail in coming times. It will have the influence of the philosophy of Kabir Saheb. It is also noteworthy that the philosophy and his teachings resemble Hindu religion. One of the reasons for this similarity is that he was born in a Hindu family and was raised in a pious place like Kashi. He has also accepted Swami Ramanand as his guru. Because he was raised by a Muslim family, the principle of One God was his theme. While Hindu religion also believed in One God, this belief was losing strength by this time.

There is a Brahmo-samaj in Bengal, which believes in Brahm as described in the Ved. It does not believe in dev and devtas. Narsinh Rao Divetia is a prominent poet belonging to Prarthna Samaj then Ravindranath Thakur is the belonging to Brahmo-samaj.

Mahadev and Mohammed, Brahma and Adam are the same people with different names. Similarly, Hindu and Muslims are the same human beings with different brand names. The language of Ved and Kuran is different, their readers are different, but in reality, they are the same people worshipping the same God. Kabir Saheb very vehemently states that these differences are worthless and he advises that they be disregarded.

(Courtesy: Adopted and compiled from Kabirvani magazine January, '01)



Kamal Raised from the Dead



Gorakhnath Humblad



Conversation between Sarvajit and Kamali



Composition of Bijak

Courtesy: Shree Ramswarupdasji, "Glimpse of the life of Sadguru Kabir", Kabir Asram - Kabir Road, Jamnagar Gujarat, India. 1990

SECTION II

*The Thinkers from the West on Kabir: Editor's Extracts
are from the Respective Books*

The Bijak of Kabir

Translated by Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh
 Essay and Notes by Linda Hess

Dr. Linda Hess earned her doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She visited India at the age of 21 and learned Hindi. She is a Fulbright scholar, a Phi Beta Kappa, and has been awarded grants from the American Institute of Study and the Smithsonian Institute. She has published many of her articles in reputable journals. She has developed her interest in Zen, a Buddhist path of Yoga. She says: "Though Kabir Sahib may be illiterate, he has employed the language in a powerful manner to shake and to remove the blind faith hypocrisy, rigid traditional beliefs and illusions spread among the people. He differentiated between the language of traditional preaching and that of the lord and truth. He made the people aware of their Atman, the true self or soul, in a direct and plain tongue."

Dr. Hess has authored a 195-page book examining the life and works of Kabir. She introduces Kabir and his thoughts in this section including the Shabda, Ramaini, and Sakhi in translation. She has translated nearly 353 'Shabda' in English along with their explanation. Finally, she has given a priceless gift to the readers by her reading of subjects like 'Avar-Vani.'

*Explaining one of the Kabir Sahib Sakhis, she says:
 Who's whose husband? Who's whose wife?
 Death gaze spreads-untellable story
 Who's whose father? Who's whose son?
 Who suffers? Who dies? (Sakhi 36)*

Many a time Kabir launches a sakhi very skillfully and cleverly by asking questions, which may confuse and startle us. The questions are asked in various ways. Sometimes, the questions pique your interest and you begin to explore. Sometimes, a question may feel like the punch of a boxer, or may even be like repeated blows on you from right to left. When the shower of questions ceases and the punches stops, the loser stumbles and faints. Such is the case of the readers of Kabir-Bijak, and when we recover from the blows, we begin to gleam

the answers to the questions. These sakhis awaken us from our illusions and gives us knowledge, which leads to the right path of life.

Compiled by the Editor.

(Courtesy: Dr. Linda Hess: "The Bijak of Kabir". San Francisco : North Point Press, 1983.)

One Hundred Poems of Kabir

Translated by Rabindranath Tagore
Assisted by Evelyn Underhill

Ms. Underhill has said that Kabir Saheb was a mystic poet with unique qualities. Here, for the first time, is an English translation of his one hundred poems. These poems reflect both Kabir's love and spiritual preaching. In fact, his spirituality does not distinguish between nature and her laws. Everything is filled with divinity. Kabir's poems use spiritual language and concrete emotions to persuade the reader. Kabir says he has had a vision of the Lord and the glory of Brahma, drunk heavenly nectar, and experienced the tender touch of godly flowers. Kabir is a poet and a musician and his poems show the harmony of truth, beauty and melody. His poems weave Indian philosophy and religion. His poem with terms like 'Leela, Maya, Nirakar, Aakar, the bird of soul, exactly', is based on the original Bengali poem by Kshitimohan Sen, in its Hindi translation. Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel Prize for his 'Gitanjali' the flavor of which has been inspired by these poems.

Tagore has based some of his poems on the lives of the medieval saints, but he has only translated Kabir Saheb's poems.

Therefore, Tagore, the excellent master of poetic art, the play of words and mysticism, must be revered for writing the name of Kabir in golden letters and amplifying his voice in western countries.

UNESCO and the Indian National Commission for UNESCO have co-sponsored and have accepted the translation of these poems therein.

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: "One Hundred Poems of Kabir" (Translated by Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill). London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1961.

Kabir: The Great Mystic

Isaac A. Ezekiel

Mr. Ezekiel has worked as a journalist for more than four decades. He was then appointed as the Principal of Siddharth College, Mumbai. He served as an associate to Mr. Horniman, a British journalist in India for twenty years. He has also served as an editor to People and the Sunday Advocate, news editor for Bombay Sentinel, asst. editor to the Indian National Herald. During the last war, he was the Asst. Director of Publicity and Recruitment for the government of India. He is well known as a reader and scholar of philosophy, spirituality and mysticism. In this book, he has analyzed the life and works of Kabir Saheb. It presents a fascinating criticism of more than 200 poems of Kabir Saheb in English. He has also compared the preachings of Kabir Saheb with other Indian saints. The most striking of them is his comparison of Kabir to Jesus. The book, which contains 443 pages, illustrates sadguru, fake guru, 'Nam-Smaran' and surrendering to Nature and such subjects very vividly.

*If there be Truth within thee,
What matters it, if you have
If you have not the sacred thread of the Brahman outside?*

Kabir Saheb doesn't preach here of speaking, listening and practicing truth. The world, which has an identity, is an illusion, and is bound to be destroyed. Kabir Saheb talks of the 'Nirguna' element, which is eternal, which manages the world, and is nameless and indefinable. It has no beginning and end. The author compares this truth with that of Jesus in the Bible.

- By the word of the lord where the heavens made Psalms 33:6
- Let thy loving kindness and thy truth continually preserve me Psalms 40:11
- O send out thy light and thy truth, Let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God. Psalms 43: 3, 4.

The world exists only due to this 'truth'. In its absence, there could not be any existence of 'Creation'. If we get acquainted with this truth and lead

such truthful life, it would conclude our life in truth and we may absolve in that supreme truth.

Compiled by the Editor

(Courtesy: Isaac A. Ezekiel, "The Kabir, The Great Mystic", Punjab, India : Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Dist. Amritsar, 1978 3rd Ed.)

The Kabir Book (44 Ecstatic Poems of Kabir and their authentic translation)

Robert Bly

The great poet Robert Bly, whose 'The light around the body' has received the National Book Award, has translated 44 spiritual poems of Kabir Saheb into English. He is considered to be the third great poet after Tagore and Evelyn Underhill to have translated Kabir Saheb's poems. Americans are unfamiliar with some of the world's great religious literature. Kabir literature is one such hidden gem. Kabir Saheb was a great spiritual poet of the 15th century who bravely exposed his contemporaries' blind faith in religion. Kabirji also exposed hollow traditional rites and rituals through poetry with his unique voice. One of Mr. Bly's poems, 'The guest is within us' draws strength from Kabirji literature:

*We all are struggling for breath, nobody proceeds
You abandon your ego and pride and look within
It will chase your disappointment and failure away
It would compensate your loss,
Thousands of suns would come up with radiance
When I would settle in that world.*

I listen to the sound of the bell and feel no agitation. The internal pleasure, as we know, is more loveable and pleasant. The sky is clear of clouds and clean. It rains within, the stream of light flows. The entire world glitters with the single ray of love. The expression of this experience of love within our four fields of body is unattainable.

Our pride, ego and all negative forces keep us devoid of divine love. The force of love drags us from miles away. Kabir Says: I have been besieged by this firmament of divine love and have been singing in my own mood in my small boat.

Kabir's poems are the meeting ground of one soul with another. His bhajans relieve us from the fear of death and our soul emancipated from the circle of coming and going, i.e. birth and death.

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: Robert Bly, "The Kabir Book". Boston: A Seventies Press Book Beacon Press, 1977.)

Kabir Legends and Anand-Das' Kabir Parchai-Duha

David N. Lorenzen

Mr. Lorenzen is a former professor and Kabir scholar at the Center of Asian and African Studies of El Colegio de Mexico. He has studied most of the legends surrounding Kabir Saheb including his birth, race, caste, and family. Other areas include Guru Ramanand, Muslim Sultan Sikander Lodi, Guru Nanak and Kabir, Hari's asking for cloth from Kabir, meals to Kabir's family by God; the same meals given to Brahmin and saints by God; the incident of the Prostitute, Choba Brahmin, the celestial damsel and God, the lusty trader, renewed life of Kamal and Kamali, the theft by Kabir and Kamal for food, Kabir and Gorakhnath, followers of Kabir, Kabir and Padmanabh, Kabir and Tarva-Jiva, Kabir and Dharmadas, Bhagwandsa, Jagudas, Sarvanand Sarvajitand, Smruti-Gopal, Kabir and Journey, regionality and religious sects, Sagun and Nergun, etc.

In the second part of the book, we find a lucid translation of Anand-Das's Kabir Parchai-Duha, by Jagdish Kumar, David Lorenzen and Uma Thakral. Everyone interested in tell-alls should study this book. We find satisfactory explanations regarding various rumours and legends about Kabir Saheb.

Mr. Lorenzen started his research on Kabir panth in 1976 and in 1985, when he visited Gangasharan Shastri, the main director of Kabir-chaure, in Varanasi. Here is a list of scholars around the world whom he had met for his Kabir research. The list includes Prof. Dr. Sukhdevsinh of Benaras University, Prof. Ramkumar Verma of Allahabad University, Prof. Garciela de Lama, the Mexican Ambassador in Delhi, Dr. Vinnand Kalevert, Catholic Uni. Of Leuven and Sikh Study Center, Berkeley, California, Dr. Uma Thakral, Prof. Jagdish Kumar of the Library of Dadu Maha in Vidyalaya, Prof. John Hole of Columbia University in New York, Rajasthan Institute of Research, Jodhpur, Prof. Susan Divil of El Colegio de Mexico, G.H. Waste-kot, F.Et. Parshuram Chaturvedi, Kedarnath Dwivedi, K.K. Bhatt, Ananta Das, Nabha Das, Hari Ram Vyas, and so on.

In addition, Mr. Lorenzen has made an extensive study of the following books: 'Bhakta-mala' of Raghavdas, Shikh-Adi Granth, Rajasthani Kabir Granthavali, Kabir Bijak of Kabir Panth, Vaghel Vanshavarani of Yagaldas,

Kabir-Parchai of Ananata-das, commentary on Nabhadas, The Kabir Mansoor, Bhaktiras Bodhini Commentary in Hindi by Priyadas, Dabistan-e-Mazhib, (A.D.1650) in Persian by Mahsin Fani, Bhakta-Vijay in Mrathi by Mahipat, Kabir-e-Mansoor (A.D. 1887) by Parmananddas (Hindi translation from Urdu), Sanskrit Bhaktamala by Chandra data (A.D. 1850), Sadguru shri kaviya Charitram in Sanskrit by Brahmlin Muni, along with its Hindi Criticism, Mukund Gugli's 'Kabir Charitra' (Gujarati book) A.D. 1951 Hajjography of Kabir by Garibads, small 11 section of Kabir Sagar by Swami Yugalnand Bihari, 'Kabir-Kausoty' by Leihana Sinh Alias Haridas; 'Tapasvinu Satya' by Prakash Satik, Shri Sadguru Kabir by Gangasharan Shastri. These various sources have been utilized by various university professors to study Kabir and his philosophy. The author of this book has also interviewed many Indian saints, studied compositions, transcriptions and commentaries for several years in different lands. This, in a way, can be called 'penance' in the pursuit of an authentic study on Kabir. We bow our heads down in reverence to a foreigner and non-Hindu who spends his life in the study of Kabir without expecting any financial gain.

We heartily thank and congratulate Mr. Lorenzen for providing us scientific information about Kabir Saheb.

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: David N. Lorenzen, "Kabir Legend and Kabir Parchai of Anandas" with additions by Nirvanjan Panthy. English Translation by Jagdish Kumar, Uma Thakral and David Lorenzen. Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publications, A Division of Indian Books Centre, 1992.

A New Look At Kabir

Krishna P. Bahadur

This book contains Kabir's life, his language, and his impact on contemporary problems. It also includes Kabir's Vaishnav inclination, illusion, saint and non-saint, worn-out rituals, Rmaini, and Kabir's bhajans with melodious tunes. Some bhajans from Gurugranth Sahib, Sakhi etc., are explained in very simple but meaningful terms.,e.g.,

*Jal me kumbh, kumbh me jal hai,
Bahar-bhitar pani.
Futyo kumbh, jal hi jalme samaya.
Yeh tatva samaj ho jnani*

The pot is in water and water is in pot, but when the pot broke, water submerges with water. This shows symbolically that when our body (like a pot of clay) passes away (the pot is broken) the water within (our soul) meets the supreme soul.

*Harare Ram Rohm Karma Keno,
Allah Ram Sati Soi.
Bismillah miti bisambhara ekai
Aur Na duja koi.*

'Nirgun-Nirakar' Brahma is addressed as Sauna in many ways: Ram, Rahim, Govind Keshav, Karma, Allah etc.

How does one actualize this name of Ram-Kabir and make it intelligible? This 'nirgun' Ram and his devotee doesn't need any bridge; hence, the memorization of Ram's name is a psychological activity. Kabir Saheb says, by love and devotion only, may you associate 'Ram-nam' with 'nirgun' Ram. We should think about the opinions of Vaishnav and Vedanta in this way. Kabir has glorified this 'Ram-nam' and its significance in some of his bhajans in the form of separation and meeting through 'Shringar-rasa' (decorative language). Sufi saints believe that God loves those most, who loves their fellow men. Such is the belief of the Vaishnavas, that God is present everywhere in many forms, many names, but ultimately he is nameless, shapeless. Kabir also reflects the

same opinion. Indeed, Kabir's Ram is the same Ram to that of ParBrahma of Vedant and to Allah of Islam. The Sufi saints see God in the form of love, and the Vaishnavas in the form of Sweetness.

A bhajan by a Rumi saint resembles that of Kabir Saheb's bhajan:

*I did not find God in the Church,
nor in the temple, nor in Pagoda
Neither was He in Heart's hills,
neither in Klander or Kaf.
I searched for him in the box in vain
No holy man gives his trace
All my efforts gone in vain
Nowhere, but ultimately
I found Him present in my heart.*

Thus, Kabir Saheb has sought the merger of all religions.

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: "A New Look at Kabir", New Delhi, India: ESS Publications, 1997.

A Weaver Named Kabir (Selected verses, with a detailed biographical and historical introduction)

Charlotte Vaudeville

Prof. Charlotte Vaudeville is a celebrated former professor and scholar of medieval Hindustani literature and religion at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, Norwell. According to her, Kabir is one of the famous men of letters and religion in India. He could be compared to Gandhi in the modern era — a symbol of secularism and religious tolerance. As a poet, his bhajans were very popular as well as concise so the people could grasp them easily. He protested the superstitions, blind faith, fanaticism and worn-out rituals in language which could be understood by the common man. His speeches, though in the old Hindi Prakrit language, were so powerful that their impact on north India was felt from Punjab to Gujarat.

In the 1930s, three scholars P.D. Birthval, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, and Parshuram Chaturvedi published several volumes that highlighted the comprehensive sense of devotion of Kabir. However, Kabir Saheb is still not as famous as he should be in the western world. Some western scholars, however, have taken note of the widespread impact of Kabir Saheb on northern India. After the end of the 18th century, they began to study Indian literature and its traditions. The true pioneer of Kabirean studies was an Italian named Quyn Mank Padre Marco dela Tomba, who had come to India in 1758 and returned to Italy in 1775. Padre Marco had translated 'Satnas Kabir' (Satnam Kabir) and Ramayan of Kabir panthi into Italian. He concluded that Kabirji's thought was basically Buddhist, as they resembled the anti-Brahmin and anti caste Buddhist worldview.

The first part of Prof. Vaudeville's book contains the historic and legendary details of the life of Kabir and his use of language, etc.

The second part contains the best translations of Kabirji's bhajans. This book is designed for English readers. It also presents the translations of bhajans and poems of contemporary saints of Kabir. Some observations or reviews of the book:

"This book is such that it attracts both the intellectuals and the common man. Both welcome the book equally." — Narayani Gupta, Financial Express

"Vaudeville has served her best in the study of 'Bhakti Literature of Kabir' — a valuable companion." — Indian Review of Books

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: Charlotte Vaudeville, 'A Weaver Named Kabir'. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Kabir

Evelyn Underhill

Kabir's songs are of this kind: outbursts at once of rapture and of charity. Written in popular Hindi, not in the literary tongue, they were deliberately addressed — like the vernacular poetry of Jacopone da Todi and Richard Rolle — to the people, rather than to the professionally religious class. Readers will be struck by the constant use of imagery drawn from common life — the source of universal experience. It is by the use of simple metaphors, the constant appeal to human needs, passions and relations — the bridegroom and the bride, the guru and disciple, the pilgrim, the farmer, the migrant bird — that he drives home his intense belief in the reality of the soul's intercourse with the Transcendent. There are, in his universe, no fences between the "natural" and "supernatural" worlds; everything is a part of the creative Play of God, and therefore, even in its humblest details, capable of revealing the Player's mind.

Kabir belongs to that small group of supreme mystics — amongst whom St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, and the Sufi poet Jalalu'ddin Rumi are perhaps the most prominent — who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These mystics have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, the static and dynamic aspects of Divine Nature and between the Absolutes of philosophy and the "sure true Friend" of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible concepts one after the other but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which they are, as Ruysbroeck said, "melted and merged in the Unity," and perceived as the completing opposites of a perfect Whole. This proceeding entails for them — and both Kabir and Ruysbroeck expressly acknowledge it — a universe of three orders: Becoming, Being and that which is "More than Being," i.e., God. God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality. He inspires, supports, and indeed inhabits, both the durational, conditioned, finite world of Becoming and the unconditioned, non-success-ional, infinite world of Being; yet utterly transcends them both. He is the omnipresent Reality, the 'All-pervading' within whom "the worlds are being told beads." In His personal aspect, He is the "beloved Fakir," teaching and companioning each soul. Considered as Immanent Spirit, He is "the Mind within the mind." But all these are at

best partial aspects of His nature, mutually corrective: as the Persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity — to which this theological diagram bears a striking resemblance — represent different and compensating experiences of the Divine Unity within which they are resumed. As Ruysbroeck discerned a plane of reality upon which "we can speak no more of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only of One Being, the very substance of the Divine Persons"; so Kabir says that "beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being."

Courtesy: "A Book of India" Pandey B.N. Harper Collins Publishers India, 2000.

The Path of Spiritual Self-Realization

Dr. Jagessar Das M.D., Canada

Edited by Jagadish Das Shastri

This booklet explains the significance of prayer. Kabir Saheb says —

*"Mala to Karme Fire, Jibh fire mukhmahi,
Man to Charo dishe fire, Yeh to simaran nahi"*

If the mind of a worshipper wanders while praying, then it serves no serious purpose.

'Swas ko kar sumiran, Ajapa ko kar jap.'

Our process of worship must be such that mind should automatically be steady in the form of Brahma. Kabir Saheb has explained the significance of Aarti by Aadi Gayatri Prayer, Morning, Noon and Evening Gayatri songs and sakhi. Saint Dharmadas was one of the main disciples of Kabir Saheb who later on, established the 'Kabir panth'. In this booklet, Dharmadas has composed Gayatri Prayers with the philosophy of 'Kabirpanth':

*'Oham, soham, sobam so, Oham kilik sobam bola
Soham soham bole resala, Kilak Kaman kamod kankvat
Ye charo jug Kabir Dharamdas ko shabad sunae, Sadguru Satya Kabir'*

'I am', 'thee' and 'thou' are 'me', we all are but manifestations of 'one'. The very voice of our inner being is the voice of Brahma-God. I am in his form. In these four ages-Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kalyug- I am the spiritual preacher. I have preached so to Dharmadas.

Kabir Saheb heard the voice of Brahma (Brahma-nand) and so is emancipated from the bondage of birth and death. By the drummer's beat, he says: "This entire world is full of God's presence. God can be had in the form and manner one worships him. God is miles away from the idlers." Kabir Saheb is the Guru for the Hindus and 'Peer' for the Muslims. He, the Guru, is omnipresent and exists in all the seven seas and all the nine continents of the world.

Compiled by the Editor

Courtesy: 'The Path of Spiritual Realization'. Surrey, B.C. Canada: Kabir Association



*Kabir Vat - The Banyan Tree
Named After Kabir*



Birth of Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj



Kabir Chaura Varanasi



*Disappearance of Kabir Sahab
in Magahar*

*Courtesy: Shree Ramswarupdasji, "Glimpse of the life of Sadguru Kabir",
Kabir Asram - Kabir Road, Jamnagar Gujarat, India. 1990*

SECTION III

*From the Devotional Pens of the Devotees of
"Shri Ramkabir Samaj", USA and India*

The Guidance of Kabir Saheb

Mr. Chhaganbhai Bhulabhai Bhakta
Former president, Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj, USA

We have our religious literature in the Gujarati language. It has been associated with our ancestral tradition of 'Samskara'. We have been united to keep them alive and in practice, among our future generation. We have a golden treasury of good Kabir literature like 'Naad Brahma', 'Kabir-vani', 'Kabir-Sakhi Sudha', 'Kabir-Ramaini', etc., by the late 'Bavaji', who was one of the leading saintly persons of our community. He made Kabir literature popular in society. In 1984, when Morari Bapu had his first Ram-Katha in America, his explanation of Kabir Saheb's duha generated great curiosity for Kabir's literature in America. The souvenir published at that event included Kabir Saheb's sakhis with due interpretation (courtesy of Sri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj). Kabir Saheb has given devotional verses full of the power of devotion, which could easily be grasped by the common man. They give us glimpses of truth and fill our hearts with pleasure and love.

Kabir presents a bitter pill with hard reality:

*"Kabir kathata jaat hai, Shrota hai sab koi,
Ram bhaje bhala hoiga, Nahi to bhala no hoy."*

The ultimate truth of all truths is to worship God with true devotional heart. Here is one 'Duha' from Morari Bapu's Ramkatha:

*"Kabir jab paida huve, Jag hanse hum roye,
Easi karni kar chalo, Hum hanse jug roye."*

Is this not a simple way to true happiness? There are many bhajans sung by Kabir Saheb, and one of the most popular in SRBS of USA at evening prayers (Aarti) is:

*"Jo ne vichari to jivada sa sukhme to mohi rahyo ji
Aryo tyare to eklo jaata eklo javanji"*

A true friend or a true relative is the one who helps a person get to know himself.

All those who deter us from realizing who we are, are not true friends.

Kabir Saheb spread the gospel of truth and knowledge of God to remove darkness of ignorance, enlighten, awaken and install spiritual values to all who came to this path. We Bhaktajans are blessed with such a sadguru Kabir Saheb.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Kabir's Concept of Death

Mr. Vallabhbhai C. Bhakta

Former president, Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj, USA

In an episode of Mahabharat, when the war was an inevitable option between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Vyas — Satyawati's son, comes to her to save her from shock and says, "O ! Mother, today I have come to perform my ultimate duty. Religion doesn't have its own consciousness; neither mother has her own knowledge. How long would you stick to motherly emotions? Come out of the bondage of such feelings. It's not an aim of life to cry for one's own generation." Vyas says:

"Time flows, as does a river, and body doesn't remain static as a boat, the soul is a traveler, always in search of its bank and that of the goal."

Here is a message of eternal truth given to the human race through the medium of Maharshi Vyas that Lord Krishna, Bhishma and Vyas all knew about the impending danger of destruction of brothers, relatives and the tyrants; however, they are not in a position to revert the eternal truth of 'death'. Vyas, with a view to rescue his mother from the shock of death, takes her with him. Kabir Saheb presents this beautifully:

Death is such a tragic event when the relatives and friends feel bereaved and melancholic and hence turn to God. Kabir Saheb explains this very effectively. He compares the sadness of death with that of separation of daughter and her father after wedding. The bride is not sad as she has to go to her husband's place, but on the contrary, she is happy. She is unhappy only because she has to leave her father's home. In the same way, one who dies is not unhappy because he has to die, but because he has to abandon his emotional and worldly relations, therefore, he is melancholic. Kabirji says in his typical expression:

*"Kar le shrungar chatur albeli, Sajan ke ghar jana hoga,
Mitti uthavan, mitti bichhavan, Mitti me mil jana hoga.
Nah le, dho le, shish guntha le, Fir vahanse nahi aana hoga."*

The event of death is delineated by Kabirji in very simple terms. He clarifies the purpose of death in his famous saakhi along with preaching:

*"Jab tum aaye jagme, Sab hanse tum roye,
Aaisi karni kar chalo, Tum hanso jag roye."*

*"Khak me khap jana banda, Mitti me mil jana,
Tum mat karo abhimana, Ek din pawan se ud jana."*

Death is certain to those who are born. Nobody comes on this earth as an immortal one. We cannot predict death, but life is in our hands. The wild animals do not have fear of death but of course, they have a fear of being killed by bigger animals. They are not shocked by death as they don't have thinking ability. As human beings are contemplative, they fear death.

*"Kachi matino ghat ghadulo, Palma futi jaay,
Pardeshini preetdi, Ek palma tuti jaay."*

In this couplet, Kabirji talks of 'deh' and 'dehi', the soul and the body, and the affectionate relation between them. When the soul departs, the body becomes valueless; the soul cannot be called back by the cleverest doctors and physicians after one's death. Thus, death becomes inevitable.

The following bhajan is sung at the time of death in the Bhakta community in which Kabirji presents the reality of life in a vivid manner. The Bhajan is very simple and needs no more interpretation. What is religion, the world, relationships, etc., are described nicely:

*JO NE VICHARI TU JIVADA**

*Jone vichari tu jivada, Sha sukhme mohi rahyo ji...
Aavyo tyare tu eklo, jata eklo javu ji,
Vachme sambandh sha kamna ,Maya jalme bandhayoji... (1)
Maru maru shun kari rahyo, Nabi male taru tanji,
Jutha re putra ne premda, Jutho bhavno bhandarji... (2)
Dhan re malya no dharm ej chhe, Je kai hathe vaporayaji,
Ant same sahu meli jase, Palme thashe parayoji... (3)
Jam re joravar lai jashe, Melse chorasime theliji,
Darun dukh janma marnnu, Tyan kon taro beliji... (4)
Sachu sagapan Hariguru santnu, Jivane jalmethi kadheji
Sukhre aapine dukh dur kare, Paribrahmane bhetaveji... (5)
Mani shake to manje, Levo manshano lhavo ji,
Daas Kabir sachu kabe, Fari nahi male aavo lavoji...*

Many human beings die while living, whereas someone lives in memory even after death. Kabir is one of them. He lives even after hundreds of years, in his words, which continue to enlighten future generations.

* Nad Brahma Pad, 44, Page-25

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Kabir: A Search

Mr. Mahendra B. Bhakta
Former president, Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj, USA

The search for the knowledge of Kabir, in a way, commenced very late in my life. I had seen his photograph in the 'Gaadi' (the domestic shrine) in my house and I know that he was our Guru. I did not know much about his life and works as a saint. Thus, though I was born and brought up in a 'Kabirpanthi' family, I never happened to come in contact with Kabir's life and works till my college years.

In those days of my college life, I had a friend named Madhusudan Pandit, in the last year. In Ahmedabad, when strangers used to ask what my surname 'Bhakta' meant, I had a ready made reply: "Why do you want to know my caste?" Brahmin, Kshatriya, Patel or Harijan... I was not clear about it. So I used to say, 'I am 'Kabirpanthi', I belong to no other caste than this. Thus, my retort avoided further interrogation. But when I repeated the same communication with Madhusudan, he became filled with joy and embraced me. Thus, in the name of Kabir, I got a nice friend in those days of my loneliness in Ahmedabad. Then onwards, whenever he happened to meet me, he used to sing and interpret a 'sakhi' of Kabir Saheb.

It was not so easy to approach Kabir Saheb, as he used to say. I was neither a friend nor a foe of anyone. Madhusudan's father was a Pandit. He was well-read regarding Kabir, he might have belonged to Uttar Pradesh or might have studied there. Thus, I may rightly say, Madhusudan paved my way to Kabir Saheb.

Later on, when I went to America, my faint acquaintance with Kabir Saheb faded, as no literature of him was available there. My only companion during the long struggles of settling there were some 'Sakhis' which I had memorized. It helped me to search within. But truly speaking, Kabir was away from me for a long time.

After a long spell, I returned to India and got some books on Kabir Saheb. The Maharaj Saheb of Jamnagar also gave me a book of Kabir-Sakhi. Thus, I revived my interest in Kabir Saheb. I was sinking into a bit of a puzzle while reading, that everything I read does not belong to Kabir Saheb. Many things were written under his name. Kabir was such a great thinker and revolutionary

that there can't be a vast controversy. I had a solace that Kabirji did not believe in Ram, the eldest son of king Dasharath, but Ram is He, who dwells in all the souls — an omnipresent entity. He says in the Bijak:

*"Sirjanhar na vyari Sita,
Jab pakhan tabin bandha!"*

This is composed in very old Hindi language, as it may be a bit difficult to follow. But later on, when I got publications of 'Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj' and Ishwar 'mama', 'Bavaji' and our monthly Kabir-vani' regularly, I tried to reach our Guru, though it was not easy as it seemed. Kabir's Bhajans sung by Anoop Jalota also made a niche in my mind and its melody resounded in my ears. But I really felt that some sort of reading made me contemplate deeper, as many of his 'Sakhi' are difficult to understand even today.

Nowadays, books on him by Swami Sachchidananda and lectures by Rajnishji have helped me to go nearer Kabirji. However, without such critical interpretations it is not easy to follow Kabirji, the saint who wrote six centuries ago. But I feel his ideology is still fresh and sharp in the contemporary context.

There is a shadow of Kabir Saheb in frequently published articles by Guntant Shah and Chandrakant Baxi. Recently, I was re-reading Tagore's 'Geetanjali', but I found Kabirji on each of its pages. Tagore, our Nobel laureate, also carries a deep impression of the life and works of Kabir Saheb. Thus, my search for Kabirji would go on for ever, I found an access to Kabirji in the melodious presentation of Anoop Jalota and Abida Parveen. Kabir was there on each page of 'Nad-Brahma.' It also contained the thoughts of other saints as well — Dasi Jeevan or Dayaram reminded me of Kabirji. Akho, a famous Gujarati poet, seems to be a close friend of Kabirji.

Thus, I found Kabirji in many places. I also got totally absorbed in him and my efforts are going on. I do not know when and how my search for such a universal spiritual figure would be completed, but I wish to carry on the quest till my last breath.

I am convinced that Kabir has certainly shown the path to reach 'Atam-ram.'

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Shree Ishvarbhai Patel (Bawaji)

A Homage

Editor: Govind B. Bhakta

The late Ishwarbhai Prabhubhai Bhakta was known as 'Bawaji' in Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj and among his associates. He graduated from Mumbai University in 1956 with a degree in Sanskrit, and also tried his best to appear at his M.A. examination, but could not take the exam due to his father's illness. He left Mumbai, came back to his village (Kapura) and adopted farming activities and remained a good reader and writer till his last breath.

He led a detached, pure and simple life for 70 years and practiced two principles of Kabirji (1) 'Kar Sahebki bandagi' (Pray God) (2) 'Bhukhe ko kuchh de' (give some food to the hungry). This is the way to make an individual and society happy. It is the eternal message of the welfare of society as well as that of the elevation of the soul. He spread the message of what a human being can do for his self-liberation and the progress of society. These two messages, to pray to God, means to pray to the supreme soul who is beyond names like Brahma Vishnu and Shanker. To give something to the hungry means there are different sorts of hunger in people; hunger for wealth, knowledge, honour, food, liberation, lust etc. Material wealth could be satisfied, but one should help others and make his life purer and purer up to spiritual elevation. Ishwarbhai practiced these principles in his life and gave a message to those engaged in the search for material happiness. He suggested the way to liberation by simple principles.

Kabir-vani publication started in 1974. Ishwarbhai Prabhubhai Bhakta has taken great care of it and made it one of the best medium for socio-educational awakening. He must be considered as Kanva-Rishi. He has made it his life's mission for the last 35-40 years to study and think about Kabir Saheb's writings and to spread it among our community. He has popularized Kabir-vani in America since 1987. He delivered scholarly lectures on the philosophical elements of the Kabir Bijak. He had a lion's share in the publication of volumes like 'Naadbrahma'.

Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj had no proper source of the philosophy of Kabir Saheb till 1955-60, whatever we knew came from our ancestors. 'Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Bhajan Sangrah' is the collection of bhajans preserving

the Kabir-literature in our community. We found the valuable services of Ishwarbhai. He dug out the hidden treasure of the 'Kabir Bijak' and satisfied the thirst for culture and religion among us. He explained all the three sections Sakhi, Shabda, and Ramine in simple terms to the readers. Three volumes based on them are 'Kabir Sakhi Sudha', 'Kabir Ramine Sudha' and 'Kabir Shabda Sudha'.

Ishwarbhai breathed his last as he had wished, in India, after calling his relatives and friends from America.

Let us quote a Sakhi from his last article in the Kabir-vani special issue of Oct. 1999 titled 'The mystery of dhyān-yoga in kabir vani'.

*Chaudah lok basei yama, Chaudah taham lagikal pasara,
Take aage jyoti niranjan. Baithe suni manzara.*

Fourteen worlds dwell in our body, all of them are reigned by Yama. The flame of God constantly burns in our body, the seer of which is above the reign of Yama. The darshan of such a godly and end of happiness and unhappiness. This self-experienced truth of life Kabirji has explained to us.

A hearty homage to the late Shri Bawaji- Sanyasi.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

The Eternal Message of Kabir — The Saintly Poet

Mr. Chandrakant Dahyabhai Bhakta
Former president, Shri Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj, USA

Kabir enjoys a unique position among the saints and devotee-poets. He has a revolutionary approach and the sharp, unassuming language of a monk.

The Indian psyche has an inedible impression of Kabir, who has assaulted the blind faith, pretension and of insignificant religious rites and rituals. His bhajans, doha, kundali, sakhi etc. inspire us to live life properly and harmoniously with each other. His truthfulness, confidence and his faith in God are very strong. He says:

*Khub khelo sansarme, bandhi na sake koi.
Jako rakhe saiya, Mar sake na koi.*

Kabir's mysticism is interesting. He is called saint, because on one hand he criticized bitterly the pretentious Pundits, Mullas and Jogis and on the other hand, he composed mystic songs. He believed that idol-worship and rites and rituals are the sources of mutual disharmony. He says:

*"Atam mar pashanhi puje,
Unme kachhu na jhana,
Bahutak peer, aualia padhe kitab Quarana,
Mala pahire topi dinhe,
Chhapa tilak anumana.
Kab Hindu mohi Ram piyara,
Turak kabe Rahimana,
Aapasme dou lari-lari mue,
Maram na kabu jana."*

It was an inauguration of truth to remove this craze for idol-worship.

Once upon a time, our unity, simplicity, solidarity and devotion were exemplary to other communities, but it is not so these days as we have forgotten Kabirji's message. He has said:

*Jin khoja tin paiya gabare pani peth.
Main bauri khojan chali gai kinare baith
Swas swas pe nam lei vrutha swas mat khoy
Na jane us swaska aavan hoy na hoy."*

Today, we have gained material wealth, but the true inner wealth was lost. We have forgotten Kabir, have given up Bhakti and forgotten God also. Kabir says:

*Dukh mein sumiran sab kare, Sukh mein kare na koi.
Jo sukh mein sumiran kare, to dukh kabe ko hoi*

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Ram-Kabir 'Bhav-namaskar' and 'Nam-smaran'

Hasmukhbhai R. Bhakta-Orna
Former editor, 'Kabir-vani'

The title of this article would lead you to unfold certain nuances of Indian religious-cultural traditions. They cannot be translated into other foreign languages because they are typically Indian. We say 'RamKabir' with a deep sense of devotion to remember the name of our guru and we also greet persons with the same words with all good feelings.

Sadguru Kabir Saheb has described the significance of 'Nam-smaran' (to remember or recite the name of God) to make one's spiritual progress in life. He could certainly achieve some inner growth, who remembers the name of God leaving the external rites and rituals of the world. Numerous saints are found, who followed this path of Hari bhajan, 'Kirtan', meditation and attained affinity with God. They have dedicated their lives to devotion. They are Meerabai, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Gora Kumbhar, Saint Kabir, Nanak, Guru Govindsinh, Saint Jnaneshwar, Ramdas etc., and Gandhiji, the champion of truth and non-violence, also wrote many good things for our guidance. They have led an exemplary life to attain salvation.

"Kanudo shun jane mari preet" - Meera
"Shri Ramchandra krupalu bhajman" - Tulsidas
"Tu to Ram sumiran jag ladva de" - Kabir
"Matinu ei kam jo karto" - Gora kumbhar
"Vaishnava jan to tene re kabiye" - Narsinh Mehta
"Marathi bhajans" - by Tukaram

These are the examples of our saintly blessings who have shown us the path of 'Nam-smaran' as an access to God.

'Namaskar,' is to fold one's hands and join palms while bowing one's head is also greatly significant as 'nam-smaran'. One is mental, the other is physical. 'Namaskar' expresses one's faith and devotion to God. It needs purity of mind, speech and action to attain inner spiritual progress. According to scriptures, 'namaskar' are of two types:

- (1) Physical or material namaskar
- (2) 'Bhav-namaskar' (Mental Namaskar)

The first type of 'namaskar' involves bowing of head, folding hands, lying straight on the ground or to do such a posture which indicates the sense of namaskar or to utter 'namaskar' is also a part of this type of material or physical namaskar.

'Bhav-namaskar,' on the other hand, includes the mental state. It is done before the God of worship, with purity of mind, deep faith, devotion and honor. It also requires our willingness to obey his orders as does a servant.

Both of these types of 'namaskar' are complimentary to each other. By joining two hands, with bowing head and kneeling down position, one should utter "Namo Namami" with purity of mind, faith, respect, devotion and obedience. Such a 'bhav-naman' is suggested in the scripture to attain the first stage of purity of mind.

The system or mannerism of doing 'namaskar' varies from country to country.

According to the Aryan tradition and Jainism, one should join hands, not completely, but should make the finger-tips touch each other, to bow head, to bend down with half of the body. In addition to this both the hands, the knees and head-these five limbs should be on the ground in a straight lying position is complete namaskar. When five parts of our body are bending in a namaskar, it is known as 'Panchang Pranipat'. These three types of namaskar are performed during the 'Darshan' and 'Pooja' in the temple. Some faults in the posture may lead to impure or incomplete namaskar. When we do not pronounce some words suggesting 'namaskar' with mistaken stress or accent, it leads to imperfect verbal namaskar. In the same way, when there is no faith, enthusiasm in mind, the mind is not detached from the world, meditation is half-hearted, the mental namaskar is imperfect, and of course, impure namaskar may occur in the initial phase, but gradually, it must improve.

A pure and perfect namaskar must be done bowing one's head. In Jainism, 'Namo Arihantanam, these seven words are pronounced first. 'Namo' means to bow down one's head. The finger tips of both hands must resemble the shape of a lotus. This is the peculiar tradition of Bhakta Samaj and we should not forget it. So, whenever we meet, we greet each other with 'Ram-Kabir' and we should also teach our children to do so. It would lead us to memorize sadguru's name and would strengthen our knowledge that Kabir Saheb's Ram is 'atamaram,' the soul within our body in the format namaskar with proper emotions. When we say 'Ram-Kabir' when meeting or greeting somebody, it merely becomes physical. Sometimes, we visit the 'Guru-gaadi' of 'Naad Brahm' scripture and bow our heads. We should pronounce the word 'Ram-

Kabir' with all the three phases of namaskar — physical, mental and verbal, with purity of heart. The other religious words like 'Hari Aum, Jay Prabhu, Jay Swami Narayan, Jay Shiv, Radha Soami, Radhe Krishna, Ramkabir etc. prove to be like knocks on the door for the vision of the soul — a very small step of verbal expression, becomes a big leap to achieve God. Such training must be given to our children to lead them to better spiritual levels.

The word 'RamKabir' creates its desired effect if pronounced before the sunrise, at dawn, at dusk etc. We should include it in our daily routine, from morning to evening and night. At the time of 'arti' we should also meditate upon the word with half opened eyes, watch our breathing. It would help concentration, and would be a first step to reaching God.

We hope all of you members of the Bhakta community as well as its elders would reinforce the significance of 'nam-smaran' of RamKabir to your family members. This small experiment will help enable our children children to lead a virtuous life.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Sadguru Kabir

The Messiah of Revolution

Pankaj Ramanbhai Bhakta-Malekpore
Former editor, 'Kabir-vani'

Saint Kabir is one of the bright zodiac signs in the Indian skies, each facet a glittering mirror; anyone can see one's own true form in him and identify the deformities of one's face.

In the ancient Vedic era, all men were perhaps considered equal, nobody was high or low on the basis of caste or class. People enjoyed pleasure on the level of equality.

Then onwards, the four classes were divided on the basis of quality and functions of people. It was merely a division of functions or duties one can perform well. It did not intend to generate any sense of ego and meanness, nor any sense of mutual untouchability. Dr. Radhakrishnan has written in his 'Indian philosophy':

"In the Rigvedic era, anyone could attain the stature of a 'Brahmin' by his scholarship and virtuosity, irrespective of his class or birth. He could be a 'Purohit' (one who performs rites-rituals worships) e.g., Vashishtha—the son of a whore, Vyasa—the son of a fisherwoman, Parashuram—the son of a low-born woman, Satyakam Jabal—the son of an anonymous father, and so on."

This was due to the generous attitude of our ancestors, the Aryans. Their views and vision spread throughout the world and this made India 'Jagat-guru.' But it did not last long. Some decaying conditions prevailed which led to deterioration.

The Brahmins got the wrong benefit of their respectable position, name and knowledge. They asserted themselves on the top of the class-ladder, irrespective of their scholarship or virtues. They considered the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Kshudras lower to them. Each class considered the other lower in hierarchy. And ultimately, the castes of Mochi-Bhangi etc., who were deprived of 'Janoi' thread ceremony, were dropped to the bottom of the caste ladder. Their right to education and learning were snatched from them. Thus, it was mutual hatred which made them weaker. The Indian social infrastructure deteriorated. Sadguru Kabir Saheb also observed the venoms of caste-discrimination in his contemporary society. He worded the vision as following:

*Eka twacha had mal mutra, Ek rudhir, ek guda,
Ek bund se snishti rachi hei, Ko brahman ko shudra.
Rajoguna brahma, tamoguna Shankar, Satoguni hari hoi
Kaha hi Kabir Ram rami rahiye, Hindu Turak na koi.*

All the human bodies contain the same skin, bones, blood, urine etc. The same sperm can create a human body. Then who is Brahmin and who is Shudra? We observe the human bodies in the form of three Gods—Rajoguni people are Brahmin, Tamoguni are Mahadev and Satoguni are Vishnu. Kabir preaches to be in the true form of one's own soul, 'Atma-ram', as there is no Hindu or no Muslim.

Kabir Saheb did not favour any religion or creed. He scolded both the Hindus and Muslims for their faults, their mutual rivalry and animosity, consequently, Saints, Mahants, Mulla, Maulavi, Pandit, Pujari felt insulted and became unhappy with Kabirji. But when they realized his uniqueness, they felt ashamed of their faults and limitations and became his disciples.

There are many controversial practices in the world of religion. Someone presses for 'Nam-jap', someone for idol worship; some consider Roja-Namaz the best and some are crazy for 'Sandhya-tarpan.' Saint Kabir is a humanitarian and his method of worship is universal. He says:

"Kar Vichar Vikar Parihari, Taran taran soy."

One who thinks and gets rid of his vices is a Wiseman. This is the only way to be liberated. The greatest worship is purity of mind, speech and action. If these three are malicious, all methods of worship are useless. And if one begins to ameliorate his mind, speech and action, nothing else remains to be done.

But unfortunately, many of our Bhakta community members — his followers — who remember and recite the Guru's name, have been deviating from his true message and the path shown by him.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Shri Ramkabir Creed: An Analysis

Shri Ishvarbhai P. Patel (Bawaji)

When was the Ramkabir creed established? Does it have its own history?

All the scholars of the world unanimously assert that Kabir Saheb had not established any creed or seat in or outside India. However, many sects and creeds exist under his name today. Dr. Key, in his book "Kabir and his Followers", describes in detail how Kabir's influence was spread well all over India. Kabir's message percolated to many sects and communities including the Shikhs, Dadu, Laldasi, Babalali, Sadh, Dharmidas, Charandasi, Shiv-narayani, Garibdas, Ramsachi, Paltoo, Satnami, Santmat, Satsang mandal, Prananki, Radha soami creed and so on. The followers of these creeds considered Kabir's preaching very valuable and tried to follow his doctrine that all human beings are the children of God. Thus, Kabirvani is like a great reservoir in providing encouragement to many creeds.

Brahmlin Muni, a great Scholar of Kabir-creed clearly says that the Kabir-sects and many of its branches have propped up after the demise of Kabir Saheb. The scholars believe that saint Dharmadas had established "Kabir-panth" at Bandhavghadh after a century in samvat 1676. Then, as differences came to the fore, many branches have come into existence. A new branch, named "Hans-Kabir" was established in samvat 1856 in Jambusar by Nihal Daji. Thus, Kabir sect was divided into many sects.

The history of a Ramkabir creed is unique. It was established by Jnaniji Maharaj in the presence of Kabir Saheb, which was prompted by the divine event of Kabirvad. Jnaniji Maharaj was the witness of Kabirvad event. He became his disciple in 1466 under Kabirji's great influence. Then, he went for penance for 12 years in the forests of Madhya Pradesh. Padmanabhaji was his elder brother, who was born in the potterman's family at Patan. Ramkabir creed was said to be generated with his support in samvat 1467. As referred to in the Bombay Gazette, the direct influence of Kabir Saheb might have been in Gujarat during 1380 A.D. to 1420 A.D. The date of 1467 means 1411 A.D. and tallies with the Bombay Gazette.

The said Gazette note had a mistake, though. It wrongly considered Jnaniji as Kabir, or "Jnaniji" might have been the nickname of Kabirji. His dates tally with the life of Jnaniji, so the mistake was corrected by the researchers. Jnaniji was a different Gujarati saint, who became the disciple of Kabirji. Earlier, Padmanabhanji had become the disciple of Kabir Saheb. Thus, with the co-operation of both the saints, Ramkabir creed was said to have been launched around samvat 1467, i.e., 1411 A.D.

When Kabir Saheb came to Gujarat in 1465, he met Padmanabhanji in Patan. Though the latter was less literate, he came under the influence of Kabir and became his disciple. Spiritually, he was much more advanced and had three learned disciples — Lochandas, Neelkanthdas and Dhanraj Pandya. They also were influenced by Kabirji. Ramkrishna Paramhansa was less literate, but he had scholarly disciples like Vivekananda, from Kolkata University. All the three disciples of Padmanabhanji spread the preaching of Kabir Saheb in the entire Gujarat and Saurashtra. Lochandas made a niche in Surat, South Gujarat, Neelkanthdas established an Ashram in Dudhrej, in Saurashtra and Dhanraj, Pandya spread the message of Kabirji in North Gujarat in the best possible manner. Thus, the seeds of Kabirji's revolutionary thoughts were sown in Gujarat since 1467.

In the tradition of Dudhrej Ashram, there was a famous saint, called Chhatthabava, whose original name was shatapraghnadas, who was born in the sixth generation after Kabirji, so he was known as "Chhattna" (the sixth) "bava" (the saint). He was really a scholarly saint. Neelkanthdas was also in the sixth generation. The chief disciple of Chhatthabava was Bhan saheb, the Bhana creed was set after his name. Ravi saheb was one of the prominent saints in the Bhana creed. His name was also attached to the Bhana creed and the "Ravi-Bhan creed" still exists in Saurashtra. In fact, this tradition could be considered a branch of the Ramkabir creed.

In the same way, there was Jivanji Maharaj in Gujarat who was scholarly and powerful. He gave the name "Uda" to the Ramkabir creed. "Uda" means "the best". So it did not care for the rituals performed by the Brahmins. They gave importance to bhajans only. So even today, events like birth, death or marriage are accompanied by bhajans only. It is said that Jivanji Maharaj used to roam along with 500 detached monks. His influence spread up to Saurashtra. His "Gadi" (the seat) was established at Puniyad, where a Mahant named Jagdishchandra functions even today.

The tradition launched by Lochandas, the disciple of Padmanabhanji, by setting an Ashram, is now no more. But there was a saint called Jogahari in that tradition in 1745, who belonged to a lower caste-Bhangi. So after the Samadhi was taken by Guru Pyaredas, the Ashram was engulfed by controversy. The Brahmins from the surrounding area attacked the Ashram and beat Jogahari bitterly. They looted the Ashram. There were many manuscripts of saintly

preaching in the Ashram. Jogahari managed to move to Mandavi with those valuable volumes. The king of Mandavi gave him shelter. Three days after his leaving Surat, the Ashram was destroyed by heavy flood in the river Tapi. Thus, it was like a divine rescue of Jogahari and the religious volumes. He returned to Surat and took shelter in Nirvan Saheb's 'Akhada' and handed over all the manuscripts to Mahant Jagannathdas. He then left Surat with a view to perform 'Parikrama' of the Narmada.

It is said that 19 generations worked to complete the present temple of Kabir Saheb at Khangad Sheri, Surat. It was established by Jnandeva, the son of Jnaniji. Dayaram, the last saint belonged to the 19th generation. The tradition includes: Jnandeva, Samdeva, Ramdeva, Vasudeva, Dwarkadas, Hariram, Bhagatram, Veerdas, Nana Bava, Gokaldas, Samdas, Bhagat vaniji, Gopaldasji, Narandasji, Madhavdasji, Karsandasji, Narsinhadasji, Govardhandasji and Dayaramdasji. At present, there is no Mahant at the temple.

The Ramkabir creed has undergone a great change after Indian independence, under the influence of Gandhiji's national movement. The transformation is partly due to western education and travel to foreign countries. "Tilak", "Kanthi" and "mala" (the three identifying symbols of the creed) have almost lost their significance. Practical sanctity has diminished and material pleasures have increased a great deal. The patterns and habits of food have greatly changed. Speech and manners are also undergoing changes as the creed has been spreading in the world. However, it's a good sign that we greet one-another by saying "Ramkabir". It's a ray of hope that we try to develop and retain a sense of solidarity by the tradition of Bhajans. As far as we retain and enrich our mother tongue in the homeland and abroad, our Ramkabir creed would undoubtedly survive. Such is a brief history of our creed Ramkabir!

The Difference between the Kabirpanth and Ramkabir creeds

1. Kabirpanth was established by saint Dharmadas, whereas the Ramkabir creed was established by Jnaniji.

2. Kabirpanthi was established at Bandhavgad, Uttar Pradesh, whereas Ramkabir creed was established at Kabirvad.

3. Kabirpanth was established in samvat 1676, whereas Ramkabir creed was established in samvat 1467.

4. Kabirpanth emphasizes only 'Nirgun Bhakti', but not 'Sagun Bhakti' whereas Ramkabir creed harmonizes both of them, with complete understanding that Nirgun manifests in the form of Sagun, so both of them render wellbeing.

5. Kabirpanth gives importance to Ram only whereas Ramkabir creed believes that Ram and Krishna are no different forms. Kabirpanth never

worship Krishna. If somebody does so, he is criticized. Ramkabir creed is free from such belief.

6. The 'Jap' of 'sat-nam' is done by the followers of Kabirpanth, whereas 'jap' of 'Ramkabir' is done by the followers of Ramkabir creed.

7. Kabir Saheb only is considered to be God, Brahma or 'Satya-purush' by the followers of Kabirpanth, whereas Kabir Saheb is worshipped as 'sat-guru' by the followers of Ramkabir creed. The 'Sadguru' has made the 'darshan' of Ram and Krishna possible, so Ram and Krishna are worshipped as God or Brahma.

8. The manner of 'Namaskar' in both creeds are different. In Kabirpanth, the followers utter 'bandgi saheb', or 'sat saheb' with both palms folded, whereas in Ramkabir creed, the followers wish or greet with the words 'Ramkabir' in the posture of 'namaskar', with both the palms joined straight.

9. Kabirpanth opposes incarnation, whereas Ramkabir creed believes in Ram and Krishna as incarnations and with harmonizing approach, they worship both of them with complete devotion.

10. Kabirpanth lacks in Vaishnavi 'Samskara', whereas the Ramkabir followers observe Vaishnavi virtues, because its founder Jnaniji Maharaj himself was a Vaishnav. Jivanji Maharaj, another saint in this tradition, was also a staunch Vaishnav. So those virtues have been preserved till today.

11. The rituals like bath 'Chauka' 'aarti' are performed by the Kabirpanthis, whereas in Ram Kabir creed no such rituals are observed. They only recite Bhajans and through which some rites are performed.

12. When a saint or mahant passes away, the Kabirpanth followers construct a 'samadhi' after laying the dead body in a ditch, whereas the Ramkabir followers cremate the dead body. In the case of a great saint, his sacred bones are preserved as memory in an urn and 'Tulsi-pot' is made over the same.

13. In the case of marriage rituals, the Kabirpanthis invite a Brahmin (Pundit) for rites like 'Grah-shanti' and wedding-rituals through vedic manner. They also arrange for a group of band (players of music). In Ramkabir creed, no Brahmin is called for marriage rituals, but any 'Aacharya' of the creed is invited to remain present so that wedding rituals are performed by reciting bhajans. In the absence of 'Acharya' a 'Gadi' (seat) is made at a particular place and 'Bijak' volume is placed on it and it is worshipped by flowers and fruits.

14. Kabirpanth is comprised of various classes/castes of people, such as Patidar, Kshatriya, artisans, Bhil, Koli, the tribal etc. They never engage themselves in exchange of marriage or dinner. The followers of Ramkabir creed are chiefly Patidars, who have marriage relationships.

15. In Kabirpanth, saints or Mahants only observe the rules of sanctity and austerity in outline life, whereas in Ramkabir creed, such rules are universal, to be followed by everyone. However, presently, some laxity prevails in this regard.

16. A Kabirpanthi makes an upward single line of sandalwood (Tilak) from the tip of the nose to the forehead, whereas a follower of Ramkabar used to make two parallel lines of sandalwood on the forehead above the eyebrows. But in reality, nobody follows this practice. It is a result of transformations brought within the last 50 years. Ramkabar creed underwent such a swift change, it seems, because it believes in a harmonizing approach, or compromising attitude. Kabirpanthi don't consider 'Prem-lakshana Bhakti' (devotion based on the lovable form of God) or 'Nam-rup Bhakti' (to utter the name of God in His devotion) as significant. Ramkabar creed does give importance to both these types along with the philosophy of Kabir Saheb. The Kabirpanthis only recite Kabir-bijak everyday, whereas Ramkabar followers recite the bhajans of God.

The comparison of both these creeds could be done in this manner. It is certain that Kabirpanthi is spread all over India, whereas the spread of Ramkabar creed is very limited, not even an eighth of the size of the former. Ramkabar creed is spread in Gujarat only. Kabirpanthi has a large number of followers than Ramkabar creed. However, the uniqueness of Ramkabar creed catches the attention of all.

Omission of burden of rites and rituals and that of Brahmins minimizes orthodox attitudes. The rituals at the time of marriage and death are also very simple. Even the compromise or end of quarrel can be sought by uttering 'Ram-kabar'. It prevents the followers from going to a court of law for their disputes. Simplicity is the prominent feature of this creed. It has made their lives simple and straightforward which appear as a note worthy quality to other people.

When and how often had Kabir Saheb visited Gujarat?

Kabir Saheb seemed to have visited Gujarat, not once, but many times. He was born and brought up in Kashi so he was familiar with the old Hindi language and he wrote his Bijak and other works in that language. There are some words in Gujarati that are similar to old Hindi — hindne, jahiya, tahiya, hata etc., are found in the 'bijak'. All such words draw our attention. How and when do the words of another language enter into the other? It is only the result of close contact between the people who speak the two languages. Kabir Saheb might have visited Gujarat frequently and have come in contact with its people. Only then have such Gujarati words crept into his tongue.

Kabir Saheb, Raidas and Pipaji were among the chief twelve disciples of Guru Ramananda. Pipaji was born to a royal family, he was the 'maharaja' of Gangrongadh during samvat 1410 to 1470. The saintly poet Anantdas has written a book titled 'Pipa Parichari' in 1645, which described the pilgrimage of Dwarka done by Kabir and Raidas, in detail. The scholars believe that the said pilgrimage might have taken place around 1460, as Guru Ramananda breathed his last at Kashi in samvat 1467.

Secondly, an epigraph found at Kabirvad substantiates that Kabir Saheb had visited the place in Samvat 1465. Moreover, saint Nabadas composed 'Bhaktmal' in Samvat 1642, which described the story of Tatva and Jiva, two brothers who had a vow that Kabir Saheb helped fulfill. Tatva and Jiva were Brahmins, staying at Shuklatirth. Their father was also religious minded. The saints and devotees on their way to 'Narmada-Parikrama' used to stay for four months during monsoon at Shukla tirtha. The temple had boarding facilities. In those days the saints used to be in groups. The Tatva-Jiva family also hosted saints and bowed their heads to them. But ever since they saw the so-called saints taking meat, wine and such items outside the house, Tatva-Jiva revolted against them. They saw futility in bowing to them. So they took a vow in public that they would bow down to a saint whose presence would give life to a dry banyan twig planted in front of their house.

Tatva-Jiva's declaration had stirred the saint community, as Shukla tirth was considered to be a pilgrim place in those days, hosting many fairs and religious gatherings attended by throngs of people. Afghan traders also used to come there for trade. Tatva-Jiva's vow had a nice publicity among people which made the Sadhu community worried. The real saints had no fear, because they were used to leading an ascetic life, but they were a rare species. There was no miraculous saint who could fulfill Tatva-Jiva's vow to bring the dry banyan twig back to life by water used in washing his feet. So the saints gathered to solve the problem, as they had a fear that society would not accept and shelter them as saints. A group of saints from North India informed them that there was a saint in Kashi whose name was Kabirdas, who was very ascetic and pious and who could solve the problem. So a group of saints from Shuklatirth went to Kashi and requested Kabirdas to come to Gujarat. He accepted the invitation to fulfill the vow of Tatva-Jiva. These details are available from the contemporary literature.

Kabir Saheb had first visited Patan in Gujarat. There was a mango grove in Patan, where a saint named Padmanabhanji lived. Kabirji stayed there for a fortnight and he came under Kabirji's influence. Lochandas and Dhanraj Pandya were the disciples of Padmanabhanji. They spread the preaching of Kabir Saheb in Saurashtra. Kabir Saheb used to do 'Satsang' where he stayed at nights, thus spreading his influence in Gujarat. His arrival in Shuklatirth in 1465 gathered a large crowd. Among them was Jnaniji Maharaj.

Lochandras established an Ashram at Surat and there was a saintly poet called Manekdas in the third generation of that tradition. He had narrated the vow of Tatva-Jiva in one of his compositions e.g.,

*"Dhanya bhakti bakhaniye
Tatva-jiva ki tek
Aanganme ek vruksha tha,*

Sadhu aaye anek (2)
Charnamrut sinchvaye
Urme bado vishvas
Sachche sant jab aaye
Manek mangal gavri
Sant Kabir jab aaye,
Tatva-jiva ke angana ke
Sukhe vatvruksh jivaye.

Sukhe vruksh mile huve,
Ghata chhai ghangor
Mul gaye patal me,
Shakha faile chahu aur (2)
Sant prabhav dikhlaye
Sohi sukhe kath,
Kabir-vad kahlaye
Tatva-jiva ki tek ko
Saheb Kabir nibhay
Kabir vat ki chbhanyame
Manikdas jubhay.

In an age of science, who would believe the truth that Kabir Saheb's "Charanamrut" enlivened a dry banyan twig planted by Tatva-Jiva? During my college years, I also considered this incident as superstitious, but later on, I came to know about the historical fact. As I studied further, I realized that the Kabirvad incident was not merely a myth, but was the truth. When I read the "Datta-Bavani" composed by Shri Rang Avadhut Maharaj, who was a renowned and pious saint of our time and who composed a line in that 52 couplet poem, "Suka Kashta ne aanya patra" ("He brought green leaves to a dry twig.") I pondered over this line and connected it to the incident of Kabirvad, Tatva-Jiva's vow. When I discussed this line with Dr. Adhvaryu, one of Rang Avadhut's scholarly followers, I came to know about the incident and that it had taken place in the garden of Deshmukh. When this took place, Rang Avadhut Maharaj was on a pilgrimage to Maharashtra along with 30 disciples. They were quite intelligent. At that time Deshmukh, a Marathai Brahmin, specially invited Rang Avadhut Maharaj at his place. The house was in his own garden. There was a tree named Audumber, his grandfather had it planted by a saint sixty or seventy years before. But it was quite dry and lifeless. The Deshmukh family was in a dilemma whether to cut the tree. Shri Rang Avadhut Maharaj stood beside the tree and poured a pot full of water near its trunk and soon the tree began to blossom with tiny green leaves. This incident had taken place

in the 20th century and was witnessed by intelligent people. If this is so, then how can we deny the truth of Kabirvad's incident?

Thirdly, Kabir Saheb used to visit Gujarat even after the Kabirvad incident. We noted earlier that Jananiji also had witnessed the Kabirvad incident. Jananiji became the disciple of Kabir Saheb under his influence and underwent a severe penance in the forest of Madhya Pradesh. He convened a mega conference of saints of all religions at all India level with the help of Kabir Saheb in the 15th century. It was entirely sponsored by the king of Manipur. These details are also available from contemporary literature.

Thus, it is an assured fact that Kabir Saheb had visited Gujarat not only once, but many times.

How and from where does one trace information about Kabir Saheb's life and times?

We know very little about the personal and family life of Kabir Saheb, because many of our saints have not written about their life history, nor they have told it to anyone. The only reason behind this, it seems to me, is that they have ceased to be an individual and have turned to be universal. It is a laborious task to find out what others have written about them. The sources are very limited regarding the life of the saints. Whatever is written by their disciples or devotees is likely to be one-sided and thus fail to satisfy the researchers. Therefore, darkness prevails regarding the life of Kabir Saheb.

Shri Saibaba of Shirdi belonged to the 20th century, however, we know very little about his personal life. Nobody knew where he was born and who his parents were. Only a government court record is available that shows he was summoned as a witness before the Jalgaon court. The lawyer asked many questions regarding the case, but he went on repeating the same answer. "What's your name? Kabir. What's your surname or caste? Kabir." The investigation did not bear any fruit and the lawyer left the case. Thus, we don't know much about the genuine saint of our time and it is obviously difficult to have much information about Kabir Saheb, who was born 600 years ago.

The westerners' admonition that we don't care to preserve our history is very much true. Nobody even paid attention to Kabir Saheb in the 19th century. Nobody knew him except the scholars of Kabirpanth. The Christian missionaries drew our attention to the uniqueness of Kabir Saheb in the wake of the 20th century. Dr. Westcott and Dr. Key, the research scholars on Kabir Saheb, published some literature which could be of use to everyone. In 1914 A.D., Rabindranath Tagore published "Hundred Poems of KABIR" and the world knew about Kabir. Indian scholars too, turned to Kabir.

The Kabirpanthi followers celebrate Jeth sud punam, as the day of incarnation of Kabir every year. The year was samvat 1455. But the researchers do not accept this date, as it is controversial.

1. There is a striking fact noted in the government gazette of Kolkata that various information is available about Kabir Saheb during 1000 A.D. to 1400 A.D.

2. The epigraph found at Kabir-vad reads that Kabir Saheb had visited the place in samvat 1465.

3. There is a Vishnu Kanchi's ancient temple in south India. It contains an assembly hall with one hundred pillars. It was built by Chaul king in the 13th century. In the third row, right hand side, there are two images carved on the pillars. Both those stone carving images are of Kabir Saheb - one is a sitting image and the other is a standing one.

4. It is a proved fact that Kabir Saheb, along with Guru Ramananda and Raidas, had visited Dwarka in samvat 1460.

5. Saint Shri Mahipati had written the preface of "Jnaneshwari Geeta" four hundred years ago. A reference that attracts attention in the same is that Vitthalpant, the father of Jananeshwar, had become the disciple of Guru Ramananda. In 1270 A.D. Kabir Saheb was chief among the disciples of Guru Ramananda and he was present also.

6. Dr. Godbole has described the pilgrimage of Jnaneshwar and Namdev. Both of these saints are said to be contemporaries. They met Kabir Saheb at Benaras. Jnaneshwar was born in 1275 A.D. If he had taken "Samadhi" at the age of 21 years, the said pilgrimage must have taken place at his age of around 15 to 16 years. Thus, he must have had the 'darsan' of Kabir Saheb in around 1290 A.D.

7. There was a lady saint Janabai in Maharashtra. She was the contemporary of Namdeva. She had composed 'Abhang' (a type of poem) in Marathi. It describes the pilgrimage of Vithoba to Pandharpur. One of such 'abhangs' clearly refers to Kabir Saheb.

*"Nachta nachta gadla pitambar,
Savadh hoi deva, asa bole Kabir."*

(O! God, while dancing, your 'pitambar' has slid down, please see it carefully. Such an attention of God was drawn by Kabir Saheb.)

If we think properly on these seven points, the date of Kabir's time in samvat 1455 seems to be false. If we accept the date given by Kabirpanthi scholars, then we have to believe that Kabir Saheb might have visited Dwarka along with Raidas and Guru Ramananda at the age of 5 and must have visited Kabirvad at the age of only 10. When Vitthal Pant became the disciple of Guru Ramananda, Kabir Saheb was present and with this calculation, Kabir Saheb must have been between the age of 30 to 35 in 1290 A.D. So samvat 1455 (1399 A.D.) turns out to be a wrong date. The Preface by Jnaneshwar

was not written in the near past, but was drafted four hundred years ago so it can't be wrong. These reasons hinder our way in deciding the date of Kabir's incarnation.

However, no scholar doubts Kabir Saheb's greatness. He was really great from all angles and points of view of all people — the best Vaishnav for the Hindus, the best 'pir' for the Muslims, Bhagat for the Shikhs, an Incarnation for Kabirpanthis, a harmonizing force between the Hindus and Muslims for the nationalists, a great revolutionary and the founder of a humanitarian religion. He did his best for the cause of the poor and downtrodden, he was a reformist for the elite and director of speech or poetry for the university researchers. Though the scholars take him to be illiterate, he has said:

*"Masi Kagad chhuyo nahi,
Kalam gahi nahin hath,
Chareu yugako mahatam,
Mukhabhi janai baat."*

On the basis of this couplet, the scholars tried to prove Kabir Saheb to be totally illiterate, and had never been to school. But Dr. Mata Prasad Gupt defends Kabir Saheb and asserts that Kabir Saheb was a self-made scholar. This is very much true for those who study Kabir in depth. We are also led to believe this from the bravery, logic, fearlessness and exactness of Kabir's speech. The readers of Kabirvani (Kabir literature) must have felt that he was indeed a scholar and a man of travel and pilgrimage. Thus, his speech contains various words from many regional languages or dialects.

The researchers also came to know about Kabir Saheb's profession. The terminology of weaving and the textile business reflects in his poetry:

*"Chari Ved kaina kiyo,
Nirankar kiyo raachh.
Bine Kabir chunar,
Nanhi bandhal baachh."*

Some words in this couplet indicate Kabir's knowledge of weaving, e.g., 'Kaina' is a stick tied at both the ends to keep the cloth straight. "Raachh" is a string used to tie. "Baachh" is a piece of bamboo while "chundadi" or "Chunar" is a cloth used by women.

Kabir says he has taken support of the Chunar (cloth) of devotion of "Nirgun-Nirakari". To weave it tightly, he has attached sticks from both the ends and he pulled the string as and when needed to produce the desired texture of the cloth. This proves that Kabir Saheb was an expert weaver, who had adopted his parental guardian's business well.

The word 'Julaha' (meaning weaver) is frequently used in his writing, which suggests a lower caste, in which he was brought up. It was a caste of the Hindus converted into Muslims and they were chiefly engaged in the weaving business. As the myth says, Neema and Niru, the guardian parents of Kabir Saheb, belonged to this caste.

It is said that the personality of Guru Ramananda changed after making Kabir Saheb his disciple. A bit of sectarianism of the Vaishnava had been removed from the mind of Guru Ramananda from his contact with Kabir Saheb. Kabirji spread the religion very swiftly among the masses. His revolutionary thoughts must have been popular among the community of Ramananda. Kabir Saheb had prepared a unifying ground for the Hindus and Muslims by removing or criticizing undesirable superstitious practices or socio-religious evils. Kabir Saheb had spread the glory of his Guru Ramananda everywhere. A couplet became very famous in those days:

*"Jatipanti puchhin nabi koi,
Hari ko bhaje so Hari ka hoi."*

Thus, the study of Kabir literature can give us glimpses of his personal life.

Did Kabir Saheb visit Surat?

Yes, Sadguru Kabir Saheb had set his holy feet on the pious land of Surat and this fact is substantiated by subsequent works of Kabir literature. Saint Nirvan Saheb had invited him to Surat, when the latter was on his pilgrimage to the Narmada. Saint Nirvan Saheb was known as Nirvan Maharaj and was a powerful and popular saint in south Gujarat. The details are available in the books like "Mirate Siquandari", "Bharat Mandal no Itihas", "Surat Mandavi nu deshi Rajya", "Surat ni Tavarikh." "Surat Sonani Murat." "Dakshin Gujarat no Itihas", etc.

Saint Nirvan Maharaj had basically come from Rajasthan. His Original name was Laxmidas, he was the disciple of Guru Keshavdas who had ordered him to go to Surat and baptized him with the name Nirvan Maharaj. He blessed him and sent him to Surat. It was during a time when the entire Gujarat was under Islamic reign. A 'nawab' was there in Surat. He and his officers were very rude and cruel. They even tortured monks and killed them. They didn't allow any saint or monk to enter into the city, which was patrolled by the police.

There was only one way to come to South Gujarat from Rajasthan. The river Tapi could be crossed at Baudhan and one has to come to Bardoli from there. Along the way were the Sarbhon and Dungari villages. Nirvan Maharaj also had come this way and performed deep meditation wherever he went.

Such a place is there today near Sarbhon-Dungari. There are some "Samadhi" of certain monks of his order at that place. The place was a road-touch site, so the travellers do visit it. It was surrounded by the locality of the Kanbi Patidars. Once, many pilgrims had passed through the route and enjoyed Nirvan Maharaj's hospitality. They had witnessed that rice was cooked in a small bowl but Maharaj served every person in the dining place from that small bowl only, but its quantity had never decreased. Since then, Saint Nirvan Maharaj had become more popular among the Kanbi Patidars.

When he came to Surat from that place, there was a large group of Kanbi Patidars with him. All of them could enter the city, except Nirvan Maharaj, as the police patrol did not allow a saint or a monk to get into the city. However, with his Yogic and mystic power, Nirvan Maharaj made the policemen unconscious and entered the city and joined the Patidar group. There was the 'Nawab Chowky' in the Chothiya Street of Rughnathpura, so the group of Patidars was allowed to halt. But then, onwards, the Nawab made them pass through various ordeals. The Maharaj won the Nawab with miracles, and his fame spread all over Surat. The power of Nawab did not come to his own help. He ultimately surrendered and spared some plot of land for Maharaj to establish an Ashram, the documents of this pact are available even today. In samvat 1537, the nawab was warned and the reference of the same is found in the volumes of Bhat. In the same way, it tallies with notes in 'Nirvan Charitra Prakash' by the folk poet Dularam Kaag. In the volume of "Surat Sonani Murat" it is mentioned that saint Nirvan had come to Surat in samvat 1537.

The Kabir-vad incident had become well-known in India, so saint Nirvan Maharaj, having been delighted with it, went to the bank of the river Narmada to have the "darshan" of Kabirji. It is said that Sadguru Kabir Saheb had given "diksha" (baptism) to Jnaniji Maharaj in samvat 1466. So around that time and thereafter, saint Nirman Maharaj might have gone for "darshan" of Kabir Saheb at the Narmada river.

Both the saints were very dynamic and influential, so they embraced each other with great affection and reverence, which turned into a spiritual affinity.

*"Maharaj Nirvan se bhetya saint Kabir,
Sthul do, ek pran the, Abhed sant Sharir."*

This means the physical bodies of both the saints were different, but their soul was one. Thus, they embraced each other most amicably. Having felt such sense of inseparation Nirvan Maharaj invited Kabir Saheb.

*Saheb bade dayanidhi,
Rakho santanko tek,*

*Preme ek din aaieo,
Likho Nirban vivek."*

Means, O, Sahib, you're the ocean of kindness! Kindly visit our place to fulfill the vow. Nirvan requests you most earnestly!

Responding to this invitation, Kabir Saheb might have visited Surat in samvat 1467, as he had come for Kabir-vad incident in 1465, as it was a certain truth. So he might have moved for two or three years in Gujarat. Dularam, the folk poet of Surat, notes in his couplet that:

*"Atal nata santka, bachan bit Gurupeer,
Preme aaye Nirban ghar, Saheb sant Kabir."*

The saints have long-lasting or permanent relationships. Their vows are also firm. Therefore, Kabir Saheb has lovingly visited Nirvan Maharaj's ashram. The place was filled with happy and joyous feelings. There were only one or two devotees who had divine vision among the mass gathered there, who could realize the divine and eternal power of Kabir Saheb. Nirvan Maharaj had really sunk into ecstasy — the perfect bliss. Others were surprised. They considered Nirvan Maharaj perusing 'Sagun-bhakti', whereas Kabir Saheb was a Nirguni Saint. It was therefore surprising for the audience to see an embrace of a Sagun devotee with the Nirgun worshippers. But this superficial difference between Sagun and Nirgun was only for the common people, which became a great obstacle in understanding the divine meeting of two great souls. The common people present there failed to perceive the spiritual significance of this divine event and began to murmur. So Nirvan Maharaj composed a couplet:

*"Kabirase kaise dil lubhayo?
Sadhum tere dilme acharaj aayo!
Kabira se Guru kaise nata,
Nirgun ke geet gaayo,
Hum to sirgun Ram ke pyare,
Yahi bahed dukh dayo."*

There is a great surprise among saints, how was Nirvan Maharaj attracted towards Kabir Saheb? Kabir is 'Nirgunvadi' and Nirvan is 'Sagunvadi' — this apparent difference became the cause of plight among the saints.

In fact, no true saint feels such discrimination. Such a difference may be at a primary stage but those who have raised themselves above the stage of mind don't feel so. They merely experience no difference between any saints. So the state of mind of Nirvan Maharaj had reached this stage when he met Kabir Saheb. The common people, who cannot go beyond the mental stage,

are bound to be unhappy and can't see the right thing. How any difference can survive, where the reign of love prevails? Both the saints were in the state of spiritual affinity, love, inner unity and oneness of soul. They have risen beyond the difference of Sagun and Nirgun. So Nirvan Maharaj wrote in an explanation:

*"Bheda bhed chaturai chhande,
Santse meri sagayo,
Charan kamal chahu santka
Prem se rahu lipatayo."*

Means the intellect may be engaged in discussing the differences, but I had no active intelligence at that time. I had actually become one with the saint and always bow to his feet whose nature is Godly.

I have become one with him with sheer spiritual love. So he requests in the last couplet:

*"Saheb more dilme baso, Aadi adal Kabir,
Nyare mat Nirvan se, Pragat raho Guru Peer."*

(O, Saheb Kabir! I pray thee to be in my heart for ever. You are the ancient and most eternal. Don't get separated from me any time. You are the very God in presence on the earth!")

Here, in the Nirvan Maharaj's prayer, we are acquainted with the Godly nature of Kabir Saheb. It is noteworthy how Nirvan Maharaj could have a fine 'darshan' of Sagun Brahma in a Nirgun saint! So at the moment of departure, Kabir Saheb had addressed Nirgun Maharaj as 'Nirgun Saheb' and from then onwards, Nirvan Maharaj came to be known as 'Nirgun Saheb'. It is no less surprising to have this result of a great meeting between two divine saints!

The origin of our ancestors

Our ancestors of the Shri Ramkabir creed are called the Patidar and Punjab is the original place of our entire Patidar Samaj. They had been born in the Rajput family of the border region of the Punjab, whose duty was to guard the country's borders. So our ancestors used to stay in the border-villages and protect our country.

Once, by the will of God, they came in contact with saints and gradually had 'Satsang' with them. They contemplated over their position and profession were they born to fight for ever and never experience the peace of life? They presented their puzzle before the saints, who advised them to abandon war to live peacefully. But if they do so, the stipend they get from the state would be

stopped and hence they will find it difficult to survive. So what should be done as a source of income? They sincerely sought the advice of saints once again. The saints suggested to them to have land on lease for farming activities, as it is an innocent and peaceful profession. They decided to have a change from frontiers to farms, as farming is pious and nourishing for insects, birds, animals and of course, human beings! Thus, our ancestors took a wise decision to cease to be the servants of the State as warriors and to begin their new profession as 'Servants of mother earth', as farmers.

The villages on the frontier have to live under constant fear of attacks and invasions. The farmers of the area also had to suffer as their standing crop was burnt by the enemies. Even their houses were also not out of danger. The cruel invaders burn the houses, or damage and destroy the property to get them to surrender. Thus, farming in those villages or areas was also not a peaceful and comfortable activity. Therefore, our ancestors were in a dilemma even after changing their profession. So once again, they sought the guidance of saints, who advised them to migrate to safer places and pursue farming.

Rajasthan is the neighboring state of Punjab, so the Rajputs moved to Rajasthan and sought the state's help to allot them arable land. But neither state nor big landlords gave them land on lease. Moreover, they found the weather and irrigation conditions, unfavorable. So they continued their migration till they reached the Charotar region of Gujarat. Here, they found regular rain, good fertile land and convenient conditions. The Muslim 'Subedar' of Charotar found the Patidars to be hardworking and adventurous. So he thought to allot the land to them to increase state revenue. The Patidars readily accepted the proposal of the 'Subedar' and decided to rent the land. Thus, our ancestors finally settled in Gujarat.

The rent was decided and the land was allotted as much as one wanted. But a problem was who would collect the annual rent. In Gujarati, we say 'bhade' (rental) but the Muslims call it 'pate' (rental), the meaning of both words is the same. Those who began to cultivate land on 'pate' were called 'patidar' and those who collected rent were called 'Patel'. They were given land free of taxes. Thus, 'Patidar' and 'Patel' were two words that were new additions to the Gujarati language.

These groups of the Rajputs had migrated from two regions of the Punjab to Gujarat: 'Lav' and 'Karav'. Those who came from Lav - were called 'Leuva' and those from 'Karav' were called 'Kadva' Patidar. Those two names were regional names, as we say 'Surati' to a person from Surat and 'Amdavadi' from Ahmedabad. Later on, the two words 'Leuva' and 'Kadva' became labels to the two castes of Patidars. Both the groups remained separated. Had they been united, the picture might have been different. Both were the Rajput Kshatriyas, a similar tribe. Both the regions today are not in India, but in Pakistan. They are in the Gujranawala district of Pakistan today. In the same way, Anjana Patidar

group of the Patidars is also named after the Anjana region of Rajasthan. Thus, all the three groups of the Patidars were separated from the original Rajput tribe, which was a historical fact. Today, we need to be united and we should hope for the reunion of all separated caste groups among the Patidars.

Our ancestors belonged to the Rajput Kshatriya tribe. Due to their associations with saints and their 'Satsang', they adopted virtuous living and refined ways of life. It made the Patidars look different from the Rajputs. Their living and setting in Charotar confer on them some comfort, luxury and leisure. So they decided to go on a pilgrimage. Some families set out in bullock-carts for Kashi Vishwanath. They were mainly leuva Patels. They moved via Mehmada- vad and halted at night on the way. A celebrated 'Fakir' named Mahmadsah was there in Mehmada- vad at that time. He was a true devotee of 'Allah'. All the pilgrims halted at his place at night. They had a post-dinner 'Satsang' with the 'Fakir'. The pilgrims had expressed their desire to have a bath in the water of the Ganga, so the Fakir had stuck his pincers on the ground and created a fountain at that very place. He said that was the river-water of the Ganges. He asked to take a bath there and to rest. He had advised not to take pains to go to the Ganga. Some families, who were influenced by this incident, took their baths there and had not continued their journey, while others had decided to continue their pilgrimage.

The families who were influenced returned and followed virtuous living according to the principles of Fakir. So this group remained adamant and stuck to their opinion and are called "Matia" Patidar even today. Some Muslim virtues were followed by them till India became independent. Other groups did not like those virtues. So they outcaste such families and compelled them to be separated.

In the same way, a group of Bhakta Patidar got separated from Leuva Pati- dar. When Kabir Saheb had visited Gujarat, some Patidar families came under his influence. In those days, Brahmins were used to performing religious rituals, so they felt that if Kabir Saheb would influence a large group of people and if these people would turn to Islam, their Brahminic profession would suffer. So they induced people to oppose Kabir Saheb, even outcast certain families who had come under the influence of Kabir Saheb. Thus, Bhakta Patidar also got a separate entity. They were in a very small number in Charotar, so they merged with the large group in Baroda.

Gradually, the Patidars felt that Charotar was also a smaller region for them to get accommodated, so some groups migrated to Saurashtra and some to South Gujarat. But one group did not accept the change and remained at Charotar only. They are known as "Charotaria Patidars." Thus, the entire Patidar community has descended from the Rajputs, which inherited two rare qualities of people — adventurousness and vigor. The Patidars would spread and prosper in the world due to these qualities. The migration which began

from the Punjab is still going on. The vigor and spirit of the Patidars add to their solidarity and confer a unique place to them among other people in the world. They are celebrated for their entrepreneurship in the world which enrich them economically.

Today, the Patidar Samaj is known by the following different names:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Charotaria Patidar | 4. Bhakta Patidar |
| 2. Leuva Patidar | 5. Matia Patidar |
| 3. Kadva Patidar | 6. Anjana Patidar |

In an age of science, we have spread and settled in various countries of the world. We also enjoy a better standard of education and living. Our younger generation would have large grounds and wider fields to prove their mettle. In such a situation, we have to be generous and broadminded. Our virtues should not become our limitations. We have to adore our community with those virtues. Our educated and cultured generation feels our community circles are narrow and limited. We and the entire Patidar groups should try to unite to provide better life-partners to our youngsters and make them happier. If we won't do so, the youngsters would select their life-partners from other communities which would not be a welcome sign for our community. We were indeed one and united in ancient times, then why should we feel ashamed of uniting once again?

Kabir Saheb was not averse to the Vedas

The followers of each creed constantly try to prove the superiority and greatness of their Guru over the others. Some Kabirpanthis try to brand Kabir Saheb as averse to the Vedas, which is quite surprising. Thus, they assert the uniqueness of Kabir Saheb in a strange way. They especially quote the following lines:

*"Jako munivar tap kare,
Ved thakei gun gaay,
Soi deu sikhapana,
Kabi na koi pati aay."*

(I directly and plainly explain the state and status of the supreme soul to the people, but they don't trust me. The very supreme soul is meditated by the Rishis-munis and the Vedas also describe its qualities in great detail.)

*Ek shabda Gurudevaka
Taka anant vichar*

*Thake munivar pandita,
Ved na paya par."*

(The very supreme element which Kabir Saheb explained in a word, the great saints, rishis and pandits discuss it in detail and the Vedas also could not perceive the same completely.)

*Ved nakal hei jo koi manei,
Jo samje to bhalo jamanei.*

(It is not proper to perceive the Vedas as the imitation of the world as the discriminative minds completely follows the basic truths of the Vedas as beneficial.)

Not a single fact noted above can proclaim Kabir Saheb as an opponent of the Vedas.

*"Yato vacho nivartate,
Aprapya manasa sah."*

This vedic slogan says that "Vaikharivani", our normal language cannot describe the supreme soul properly. So the Veda praises it by saying 'neti' 'neti'. "The Vedas cannot describe it" means the supreme element is so lofty and beyond description. This does not mean that Kabir Saheb has opposed the Vedas. It is the limitation of the language that cannot describe God. There may be some negative and many positive things in the Vedas, as we do have in our world. But the persons of balanced mind can interpret it well. They don't say that the Vedas are the imitation of the world. It is simply a question of wise discrimination. Hasty interpretation may lead to injustice to Kabir Saheb and it is not proper to brand Kabir Saheb as an opponent of the Vedas. If we believe so, then many of his writings support the Vedic opinion, should they be proved false? e.g.,

*"Chari Ved kaina kiyo,
Nirankar kiyo raachh,
Bine Kabira chunari,
Nanhi bandhal baachh."*

In these lines Kabir Saheb has accepted the support of the Vedas to prepare a chunari (Symbolic cloth of devotion) of Nirgun, Nirakar God. 'Kaina' means a stick to be tied at both the ends to tighten the cloth. Raachh is string. Baachh is a bamboo piece. If a cloth texture is to be maintained it should be tied tightly at both the ends and to be pulled as needed. 'Nirakar' as the string.

Thus Kabir Saheb has not opposed the Vedas by using this textile terminology, but he has on the contrary supported the Vedic opinion.

*"Saheb saun sab hot hei,
Bande te kachhu nahi,
Rai te parbat kare,
Parbat sai manhi."*

This world its birth, existence and destruction is caused by 'paratpar Brahm' only. This Vedic opinion is expressed here poetically. Nobody can deny this fact. 'Parmatma the supreme soul is only all powerful. A human being is just like a child in front of Him. Godly power can do anything anywhere, anytime. It may create or bring water on the land and vice versa. It can make a mountain out of a small particle and can turn a mountain into a particle of clay. Nothing is impossible for Him.

*Sab gavei anuman se apane,
Tav gati likhi nav jaave,
Kabe Kabir kirpa kari janpar,
Jyon hei tyon samjave."*

(O Lord! all the followers of all the religions of the world describe God as per their perception, but He is really indescribable. No human speech or mind can ever reach to God. So, O great Lord! kindly bless us with your 'Darshan' in any form. This solemn prayer of Kabir Saheb also substantiates the Vedic opinion.

*"Nayamatma pravachanen labhyah,
Na meghaya na bahuna shruten,
Yamevaish vrunute tena labhyah,
Tasyei shabatma vivrunute tanuswam."*

(The attainment of Atman cannot only be had by the study of scriptures, by sharp intelligence or by special scholarship, but it depends on who the God — parmatma — confers his blessings completely. In the above limes of verse, Kabir Saheb also prays for God's mercy most politely. It is very much for the 'darshan' of God.

*"Lali mere lalki, jit dekho tit lal,
Lali dekhan me gai, mein bhi ho gai lal."*

Here 'Lal' means one's own dear God. Who else could be dearer than Parmatma? Jiv (the human self) wants to see the unparalleled beauty of his dearest God, and he becomes one with His beauty, he experiences 'adwaita' oneness with Him. This experience is well expressed by Kabir Saheb in the above lines. How can he be opposed to the Vedic knowledge? Any person with reason and reading would unanimously say that Kabir Saheb supports the Vedic ground; there is even no air of opposition in him. Shukla Yajurveda says that God should be worshipped as considering him a beloved:-

"Priyanam twam priyapatim hawamahe!"

(Shu. Yajurveda. 23/19)

The root of 'prem Lakshana Bhakti' is in the Vedas. It is expressed a bit differently in the Rigveda as:

*"Oham gaav iva gramam Yuyudhirivaswam
Vasreva vatsam sumana duhana
Patiriv jaayam abhinonye tum dharta
Divi savita vishwanarah"*

(Rugveda. 10/149/4)

This sanskrit reading could be phonetically and meaningfully translated into Gujarati as:-

*"Gaay jaaye jem kodhe dodi vatsani pass,
Yuddha patya pachhi gharbhani shurvur jaaye khas!,
Patnine malva pati vilamb vina jem jaay,
Sukhna sagar sama prabhu bhakta sang joday!"*

(As a cow runs to meet her calf in the cattle shed, as a brave warrior eagerly rushes to his home after the war is over, as a husband feels eager to see his wife when he is coming from outside, in the same way God also anxiously feels hastily to go to his devotee as God is an ocean of happiness. How nicely Kabir has expressed the 'Prem Lakshana bhakti' in the following line :-

"Hari mor piv mein Ramki bahuriya."

(I'm God's beloved and He is my lover.)

Even better expressions are found in the following couplet:

*"Jal upaji so neha,
Ratat piyas piyas
Mein thadi birhim
Mag jou pritatam tumari aash."*

(O Lord! however, being born in water, I have been thirsty and asking for water. I have been waiting for you, O, my Lord. I have the only desire to meet you.)

There are many such couplets which prove that Kabir Saheb was not opposed to the Vedic opinion.

God can be worshipped not only as beloved and lover, but as father and mother also, says the Vedas:-

*"Twam trata tarne
Chetyo bhuhu pita-mata
Sadminmanu Shanam"*

(Rugveda. 6/1/5)

(O, Lord my saviour, you protect me from three types of trouble, so you are the parents of the entire human race!)

Sadguru Kabir Saheb also substantiates this Vedic knowledge in the following couplet.

*"Nirgun hai so pita hamaro,
Sirgun hei mantari,
Kisko vandu, kisko nindu,
Dono palda bhari."*

(The Nirgun form of parmatma is like our father and the sagun form is like mother. We bow our heads to both the forms, as we could avoid none of them. Our existence is not possible without both of them.) How can one prove such authentic views of Kabir Saheb as opposite to the Vedas? The creator of this universe — Ishwar, Parmatama, Brahm — dwells nowhere but is hidden in the heart of all of us. Here we are clearly reminded of the 'Shloka' of 18th Adhyay of Shrimad Bhagwad Gita:-

*"Ishwarah Sarva bhutanam
Rhidyesh Arjun tishthati,
Brahmayan Sarva bhutani
Yantra ruthani maya yaa."*

Sadguru Yogeshwarji has put this in 'Sara Gita' in Gujarati as:-

*"Ishwar sauna rhadayma Arjun vase kare
Tena balhi karma sau aa sansar kare."*

Kabir also put the same sense in the following couplet:-

*Rhiday zarukhe baithke
Sabka mujara let,
Jaisi jiski chakri
Taisa tisko det."*

The Kabir literature presents the eternal truths based on the first hand experience of Kabir Saheb like a philosopher. It clarifies the doubts of the devotees by apt illustrations. A good reader of Kabir literature never feels that Kabir Saheb has ever avoided the scriptures, but on the contrary, sometimes he has exemplified the complexities of scriptural preaching. So he says:-

*"Bed (Ved) Kitab kin kinh jutha
Jutha jo na vicharei"*

(K.V. page 344)

(Who says that the Vedas and the Qurran are false? The liars are those who do not think of God properly.)

The discriminating mind always understands where the well being of life lies. They don't have any 'complexes' in their minds. In fact, when these complexes are broken, discrimination arises. The people suffering from complexes cannot judge what is good or bad at the proper time. They sometimes consider bad as good, and vice versa. This creates controversy. So the judicious and discreet people interpret the meanings of poetic expressions very carefully. They quote allusions of scholarly people who consider scriptural knowledge as authentic support.

"Treigunya vishya Veda" or "Ved vartana" Such words have been used by Lord Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita, so can we consider Krishna an opponent to the Vedas ? It would be proper to say that the Gita represents the true mean-

ing of the 'Jnankand' of the Vedas which was in a state of limbo. He uses the word "vedvarta" for those who stick to the rites and rituals of the Vedas. The true subject of the Vedas is not only describing the 'triguni' world, but how to conquer those three 'gunas' and to know the 'inner soul' within the body and to know the all pervading eternal spirit out of body. Such mystic ideas are to be followed with sharp intelligence. Kabir Saheb follows the same method. He was clever at telling everything within two lines of a couplet only. So he might not be understood clearly by everybody. But everyone has to keep in mind that like Lord Krishna, Kabir Saheb was also not averse to the Vedas.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Development of Life

Chhitubhai Gordhanbhai Bhakta

Let me begin with a sakhi of Kabir Saheb, which would enlighten our path of life.

*Sangati te sukh upje, Kusangati te dukh hoy,
Kahei Kabir tah jaaiya, Jaha sat sangati hoy.*

Gandhiji has said that good company would water the seeds of virtuosity and bad companies worsen it.

'Satsang' plays an important role in the inner growth of a person. One need not do anything to deteriorate; such causes naturally unite to bring the result. While progress, or development in life, requires conscious and continuous laborious efforts.

Sharad babu, a famous Bengali novelist, has said "those who have life, doesn't have speech and vice versa." This is a very true observation. Man has become cleverly vocal, but has created discrepancy and dichotomy between theory and practice, between speech and action. As a result many quarrels or differences of opinion have propped up. The remedy to this situation is to establish harmony between life and education, speech and action.

Our manners, thoughts, speech and action must be harmonious and inspiring. It is said that the use of words can make or mar relationships Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, spoke only this much in the Mahabharat that the sons of 'the blind are blind.' These words were taken very seriously by the egoistic Duryodhan and he created the war of Mahabharat. Our sadguru Kabir Saheb also warns in the same sense:

*Shabda sambhare boliye Shabdak hath na paav,
Ek shabda kar aushadhi, Ek shabda karu ghaav.*

Tolstoy, a famous Russian saint and thinker, was asked about the value of development in life. He replied, a small piece of iron could earn one rupee, but a horseshoe made out of that piece would earn five rupees and if the same iron is used in making minute parts of a watch, would be considered more precious, earning hundreds of rupees. The basic thing "iron" is the same in quantity and

quality. But if you simply treat it, develop it into valuable forms. Life is also no different. The way we develop, the higher its value would go.

An ideal student must have the following characteristics: truthful, supportive, brave, happy, courteous, generous, patient, tolerant, diligent, obedient and so on. Such qualities would give the desired shape to life and the value of life could be raised.

Determination and firm will are also equally important in developing one's life. One should think that he is not weak-willed, but firm in this decision. A boy showed his palm to a palmist and asked about his future in education. The palmist replied that there was no line of study in his palm. The boy soon took a knife lying nearby and drew a line on his palm. He then showed his palm to the palmist and said: Now? Shall I be able to study? Seeing his firmness, the palmist encouraged him. Later on in life, the boy became a great Sanskrit grammarian. He was none other than Panini.

Each child carries great potentiality hidden in him, as does a small seed of a Banyan tree is capable of growing a large tree. Such hidden qualities must be developed with firm will, good faith and hard work. Sadguru Kabir Sahab has said,

*"Jaisa bhojan khaiye, Vaisa hi man hoy,
Jaisa pani pijaye, Taisi bani soy."*

One should work hard diligently, even amidst adverse situations as does a honeybee sticks to a flower and sucks honey. We can also obtain sweetness by perpetual efforts in life. One should also not believe in bad omen. It disheartens an individual and diverts him from the path of effort. But if we think, with understanding, there is nothing like bad omens, it is merely our superstition which drags us behind.

Deep faith and firm determination are the basic things in trying to achieve something, without which no spark could be lighted in life. A faithless and weak-willed person misses his aim and loses his direction. Faith generates power to work. Kabir Saheb has said:

*Ghate pani sab bharai, Avaghat bhare na koi,
Avaghat ghat Kabir ka, Bhare so nirmal hoy,
Kabir hari ke namse Koti vighna bati jaay,
Raj matra bai sandra, Deta hath jalaay.*

However, we see the victory of untruth around us, truth ultimately prevails and wins. This is known as faith.

Courtesy: Translation by Dr. Chaitanya Desai

Appendix A

"I have tried to be as non-technical, brief, simple and clear as possible. This article is by no means complete and comprehensive, and should serve only as a starting point. A short bibliography is given here. Although I have referred to many scholars, works of all have not been included in the list. Romanization of the Indic terms has not been done." -Dr. Radhekanth Dave

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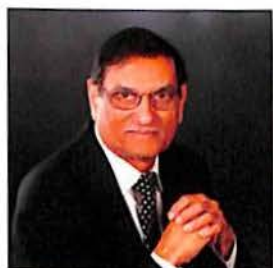
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Thus Says Kabir, “Listen, O’ Brethren *Sadho!*”

EDITOR: GOVIND B. BHAKTA

‘THUS SAYS KABIR, “LISTEN, O’ BRETHREN SADHO—Truth Seeker!” is a valuable (granth) publication for all Kabir loving fellows. Kabir Saheb represents the highest summit of the Bharatiya revolution of medieval times. Kabir vani is the immortal legacy of the entire Bharatiya and world literature. His poems convey indescribable spiritual experiences of impressive expression. The literary writers and scholars worldwide are interpreting and appreciating Kabir literature. Former Prof. Govindbhai Bhakta has put great effort in selecting articles from Bhakta thinkers of Kabir Saheb, scholars from India, and followers from different parts of the world who have studied Kabir in depth. The various authors’ compositions of Sakhi, Sabda and Ramaini of Kabir Saheb are superbly discussed in this book. This publication includes articles by different scholars, written from various perspectives. It compares the contemporary, religious, social, political situation with that of Kabir’s time and tries to remove the misunderstandings prevailing in the world. With such painstaking work by Govindbhai, I am sure this Granth (book) would be a treasured ‘light house’ not only to Kabirpanthis but all compassionates who wish to enjoy Kabir’s literature.

—Dr. Bholabhai Patel, is a Retired President of the Hindi Department, Gujarat University. He is a well known writer, editor, and winner of many awards in India and abroad.



Govindbhai B. Bhakta earned his B.Sc. in Mathematics in 1960 from Sardar Patel University and a M.Sc. in Statistics in 1962 from Gujarat University. He served as a lecturer in Garda College, Navsari from 1962 to 1968. He then immigrated to the United States in 1968. He has been in the real estate business the past 35 years and is active with youth education in the Indo-American community in Los Angeles and Orange County. Mr. Bhakta was a Founding member and on the Board of Directors of the Shri Ramkabir

Bhakta Samaj of USA. He was a recipient of California State Assembly Certification of Recognition and a Pioneer Recognition Award from the UCLA Asian American Studies Center in honor of his outstanding dedication to the Asian American Community. He also authored “*Patel’s: A Gujarati Community History in the United States*”. In honor of his Achievements in scholarship, chronicling of the Bhakta and Patel communities in the U.S. and all of his other contributions to the Bhakta Community, Shree Ramkabir Bhakta Samaj of Southern California presented a certification of dedication with heartfelt gratitude.