



## **Sant Kabir As A Mystic Poet**

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### **APA Citation:**

Gupta, S.K., (2021)., Sant Kabir As A Mystic Poet , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(2), 1412-1425; 2021.  
Submission Date: 25-03-2021  
Acceptance Date: 12-05-2021

### **INTRODUCTION**

Fifteenth century was the time for the efflorescence of Bhakti Poetry in India by the participating great devotees of God and poets and singers like Vidyapati, Mira Bai, Ravidas (also known as Raidas or Ruhidas) and the great Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. It had its earlier link with the sixth century Vaishnavite and Saivite saints. Bhakta kabir's life and work enriched this movement and made a synthesis with the Sufi movement and poetry which was akin to it in essence. He was a man of the earth; a weaver by profession. "Like Paul the tentmaker, Boehme the cobbler, Bunyan the tinker, Tersteegen the ribbon-maker, he knew how to combine vision and industry; the work of his hands helped rather than hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart." wrote Evelyn Underhill (*Songs of Kabir /Introduction*). A poet of the earth he became a spiritual leader among his men living in India's spiritual centre, the oldest town of the world, Varanasi or Banaras. He was a Bhakti poet. His ideas were akin to Sufi and Baul. His poetry was spiritually rich; esoteric and mystic.

A seeker of truth finds an access to a mystical impulse through the arch of aura and gets the inkling about the ways of the universe whose architect is the Supreme Power. Such has also been the case with Sant Kabir whose secular and balanced approach to religion based on a philanthropic mission, made him a real seeker of truth under the impact of various influences, meditation and the grace of the Guru (guide). It is not merely through his versions and valour of speech that he advocated the path of devotion devoid of dogmas, but it is also his lusture of poetic communication through which his union with the One has been affirmed. Commenting on his mysticism may mean only a guesswork as the path of his poetic world is not only enlightened with devotion but also leads to the gateway of unique knowledge and needs to be cautiously probed, keeping in mind the highest realms of his spiritual experiences as well as literary expeditions. A close study of Kabir's poetry makes one believe that he is such a multi-dimensional, essence-taking enlightened poet that his poetry embodies almost all shades of mysticism and theories related to Indian philosophy.

Kabir must have obtained the acquaintance "of the *Upanishads*, the yoga of Patanjali, *mayavad* of Shankaracharya, devotion of Ramananda and Nimbakacharya, love-born intoxication (madakta) and prick of separation (virah) of Sufis in heritage"<sup>1</sup>. It must have been under the impulse of a high sense of judgment prompted by his experience and introspection that made him incorporate these aspects in his poetry. With regard to emotion and devotion, Kabir's mystic consciousness can be classified into two groups : emotional mysticism and devotional mysticism.

Couplets signifying the spiritual love of the poet incorporate the emotional kind of mysticism. The experiences embodying his love for the Supreme make Kabir reach the summit of extraordinary peace and supernatural pleasure. All the worldly pleasures seem to be tasteless. The consciousness of the worldly behaviour is vanished, paving the way for only one complete and extraordinary consciousness. Even mere thought of the

pleasure of love-experience makes Kabir's soul restless to have a sight of his love. Thinking about the various ways of uniting with the Almighty, Kabir's soul feels like transforming itself into ashes. In one of his couplets, he also wishes to send a message to his Love through the smoke of his body so that He may shower His grace and Kabir may attain peace. He explicates this love by deploying symbols from marital bond which is known as the zenith of love in worldly relations.

The other kind of Kabir's mystic experiences is that of *sahaj samadhi* (a state wherein the soul enjoys continuous communion with the Lord) which is known as the perfect state of meditation by saints and seers. In the *sahaj samadhi*, all the five senses remain in constant touch with the Almighty. Instead of subjugation of the senses, he puts emphasis on their pacification. He also asseverates the significance of love for uniting with the Ultimate. In order to elucidate the journey towards that perfect state, Kabir uses the vocabulary of the *yogis* (ascetics). At such places, Kabir's expression lacks in that sophistication which is apparent in his emotional mysticism; still such expressions are not dull and dry like those of the *Nathas* and the *Siddhas* (two famous cults of Kabir's age). When he is absorbed in *sahaj samadhi*, he does not like anything except the feet of God. He lives in *shatdalkamal*, i.e., the sixth chakra (cardinal plexus) and listens to *anahad nad* (a particular sound that is listened during the journey of consciousness). He concentrates at the nœxie of *ida* and *ping/a* (two nerves of human body), a point beyond the approach of *kal* (demise). He delineates the goal of our life, i.e., the way to achieve fate in which man is freed from the bond of regular coming in and going away from this world, i.e., leading to salvation.

It is true that there is no such criterion as can isolate Sant Kabir as a mystic poet from Kabir as a poet, yet there is a wide scope of analysing Kabir as a mystic poet on the basis of varied features present in his poetry. A major part of his poetic outpourings unfolds his mystic experiences. Before discussing those experiences and the way of unification with the Ultimate as expounded by the poet, it is essential to take into account the factors which are directly or indirectly related to it. The elements closely related to mysticism may be identified as (i) Theistic view (ii) Love and Emotion (iii) Guru, i.e., guide (iv) Marg, i.e., the way or the means. In Kabir's case, there is also the fifth element termed as *maya* (worldly illusion) which is an integral part of his poetry.

### (i) Theistic View

Theism is the basic feature of a mystic. As a seed sown in a barren tract of land never germinates, in the same way, there is little possibility of the presence of a thought related to the divine in an atheist. The heart of a theist is a fertile tract of land with fabulous growth of love under the impact of the Guru's (guide's) teachings. He gives full recognition to the Omnipresent Power and views It in his 'self', out of his 'self', indeed, all around him and also in every object of life. Kabir says, "I feel that Ram is equally present in a tiny blade of grass or in the mountain mass"<sup>2</sup>.

Kabir is a theist to the core of his heart. He is a firm believer in the Supreme Power. He expounds that the Ultimate is present in every particle of the world and each object of the universe is resplendent with divine lustre:

*The Lord dwells in every Being  
None's bereft of Him  
The Being where He manifests  
Shines in His Beam.*

Humility and acceptance of religion are the hallmarks of a theist. Being simple and plain, he shows no discrepancy in his thoughts, expressions and actions. All the above-stated attributes are easily traceable in Kabir as a person as well as poet.

The only thing that creates a state of confusion is the use of the term *shunya* (void or nothingness) in the poetry of Kabir, but this confusion occurs only when a reader tries to relate it with *Sunyavad* (Nihilism) of Buddhism. The use of *sunya* (void or nothingness) in Kabir is different from that of Buddhism. There are many evidences denoting theism in Kabir's poetry. His sunya is closely related to the *sun* (the region between *brahmand* and *satlok*, i.e., the universe and the world of higher consciousness) region of *Sant Mat* (sect of saints), "beyond which is that *Sat Desh* of *Sat Purush* who is beyond the *Para Brahmn*, beyond the three lokas-Pind, *Und* and *Brahmand*."

*Beyond Vedas, beyond differences*

*beyond sin or virtue;  
beyond knowledge, beyond meditation,  
beyond solid or void;  
beyond dress, beyond alms,  
beyond all snobbery and form;  
Kabir says, beyond the three worlds,  
the Essence unmatched is.*

Thus Kabir was a staunch believer in the Supreme. He marks His presence everywhere, "The Lord is in me, the Lord is in/you, as life in every seed. O/servant! put false pride away, and/seek for Him within you".

### **(ii) Love**

The second important feature of Kabir's spiritual devotion is love. In the *Bhagavadgita*, it is delineated that love is the basic path to attain the Supreme. Its significance has also been established in the *Upanishads*.

Kabir too believes that Rama is attainable only through love. That is why, he sings the songs of His glory and urges to view the world through the eyes of love and take Him as Omnipresent :

*Open your eyes of love, and see  
Him who pervades this world !  
consider it well, and know that  
this is your own country.*

It is this inference that makes a man disinterested in worldly affairs and allurements based upon *maya* (worldly illusion) and he moves ahead on the virtuous path *to* be one with Him.

The path of love is very mysterious. Even without attaining the lover, mere emotional attachment with him also provides satisfaction and mental peace. But, unfortunately, if *maya* (worldly illusion) becomes an obstacle and *jeeva* (soul) is unable *to* attain his most lovely Almighty, her heart is filled with *virah*, i.e., prick of separation. The *virah* is also a gift of God as its prick makes the unity of the soul and the Supreme possible. In that state, *jeeva* (soul) abandons all worldly pleasures. To Kabir, *virah* from Ram is unbearable.

The highest state of love in this world is evident in marital relations. That is why, Kabir explicates the love of the soul and the Supreme with the symbols of husband and wife. Being a *bhakta* (devotional) poet, Kabir idealizes the love of *sati* (a loyal woman) and *sura* (a brave man).

The emotional flight of the soul towards the Supreme is not sufficient; it is essential *to* resolve all the desires. It can be called the state of single- minded devotion or complete surrender *to* the Almighty. Generally, red colour is used *to* represent love in literature and Kabir finds the reddish lusture of his \_ Love all around.

He also compares the beauty of his Love with the congregation of suns. Kabir's emotion of love which is also known as *Rama-Rasayan* (spiritual wine that is a blend of love and knowledge prepared on the furnace of heart) is a melodious harmony of *bhaktas* and *sufis* (the Hindu and the Muslim devotees).

### **(iii) Guru, i.e., guide**

Kabir's love is not merely sentiment-based, rather it is lightened with the lustre of knowledge. His Guru (guide) is the source of this love for which he is always indebted to him. In fact, it is the Guru who inspires his devotee to sanctify his body and mind. Apparently, he chides his disciple, but he is very soft within :

*The Guru is potter, the disciple is clay : moulding  
and moulding he amends his flaws.  
Within he supports him with love : without he deals  
blow on blow.*

In various Indian epics, the glory of Guru has been highlightel The *Upanishadas*, the *Bhagavadgita*, almost all the sects and religions of India, signify the paramount importance of Guru. Kabir was inspired for devotional love towards the Guru from Ramananda and *Nathpanthis* (believers of *Nathpanth-a* sect). It was further intensified through his own experiences.

Kabir emphasizes the necessity of a real Guru. According to him, one who possesses the knowledge of Reality; who has experienced the truth and has the power to convey it to the devotee, enjoys the privilege to be called a Guru. The poet avows :

*Guru differs from guru and, the natures of gurus are diverse.  
Worship ever that guru, who can reveal the secret of the word.*

Thus the real *Guru* (guide) is one who unravels the "secret of word"; he is the person who realizes the truth and transmits it to his disciples. Kabir believes that no expectation on the part of the *Guru* (guide) and complete devotion and surrender on the part of the disciple are the essential attributes of the people treading this path.

There are traces of deep stress on the guide's commendation at various places in the poetry of Sant Kabir. He finds himself in a state of confusion when he views the *Guru* and *Govind*, i.e., the guide and the Supreme standing together as to whom he should pay his obeisance first. But very soon he prostrates before the *Guru* recognizing that he is the person who has made him realize Govind (Lord). In Kabir's poetry, we find the place of *Guru* higher than that of the Supreme even. He avows in explicit terms :

*Hari lost, Guru shelters : the Guru lost, there is no refuge.  
O sinful man, call on the guru, not upon another.*

In this way, it becomes clear that the *Guru* is a very important thread between the soul and the Supreme. In fact, he provides us the knowledge of his own experiences which is different from and far better than that of the *Shastras* (scriptures). Kabir believes that with the *guide's* grace, a man attains knowledge and faith in the Lord and it is affirmed with his blessings only. Thus *Guru* is an infallible medium of devotion without whom even a glimpse of the Supreme is not possible.

#### **(iv) Marg, i.e., the way or the means**

The goal of a mystic is to attain union with the Ultimate and numerous ways have been propounded by the prophets and oracles to attain this end. Some preach to move through *jnana* (knowledge) whereas others consider love and devotion as more effective means to establish a rapport between the soul and the Supreme. Physical discipline and concentration are also presumed essential to attain the Absolute.

Kabir's poetic outpourings also unfold various means to attain the same goal, i.e., perpetual peace in the communion of Lord. All the ways described earlier occupy a significant mention in his poetry. The search and attainment of a real *Guru* (guide) is of vital importance as it is the *Guru* only with whose grace the soul realizes truth. *Bhajan* (reciting the name of Lord), knowledge, wisdom, etc. are considered essential in this regard. At times, his poetry brings forth the way of unification through yoga and meditation. Here, it is not possible to discuss the place of these features in his poetry due to the paucity of space.

The poet asserts that through yoga and knowledge, one can attain the Almighty Lord, but it is very difficult for a commoner to adopt this path. Therefore, he asserts that *prapatti marg*, i.e., single-minded devotion, is the best way of union with the Supreme. Instead of asseverating the way of subjugation of senses, the poet mentions that the bonds of *maya* (worldly illusion) and five distortions are lacerated ineluctably through devotional love. He finds that the saints and ascetics are "steeped in their own doubts and disputes" and avows that a steadfast heart on "love-devotion to Almighty god" can lead to salvation.

*All the saints and ascetics  
Are steeped in their own doubts and disputes.  
Says Kabir, do listen O, saints  
If you remain steadfast  
On love-devotion to Almighty God  
He will give you salvation.*

#### **(v) Maya (worldly illusion)**

Kabir's views about *maya* (worldly illusion) are compatible to *Keueladwaituad* (pure monism) of Shankaracharya; though here and there the effect of *Sankhya* (one of the six parts of Indian philosophy), Sufism (a sect of Muslim saints) can also be viewed. Kabir, in true sense, is a real essence-taker as affirmed in the *Akhand Bharti* :

*Kabir is not merely the name of a person, rather he signifies a whole philosophy. He represents a contemplative technique that amasses "Omnipresent in particle" and "ocean in pitcher".*

By calling *maya* the "son of a barren woman" Kabir wishes to depict its non-existence. He also tells us that "This Maya, beguiler of the world, has pursued / all the world with her beguilements". Kabir depicts it as a "serpent-wife that preys upon the world" and it is very difficult to be away from it as it has ensnared gods, goddesses, ascetics, kings, beggars and *yogis* including the wise :

*A single creeper wrapped its coils round the three regions of the world : from its bonds the wise even cannot free themselves.*

Thus Kabir believes that whosoever takes birth and vanishes, has to pass through the blind zone of *maya* (worldly illusion). He perceives the power of five elements and three *gunas* (attributes) behind the whole game of this world. Even behind sin and virtue, honour and disgrace, fame and defame, he detects the game of *maya* (worldly illusion). "She is herself root, flower and orchard : she herself / plucks and eats". To him, *maya* (worldly illusion) is three-dimensional and *sat*, *raj* and *tam* (purity and goodness, opulence and exhibitionism, ignorance and darkness respectively) are its three elements. "Having a serpent-noose within her, she has plundered/ and devoured all the world" .

Kabir illustrates that basically the power of *maya* is two-dimensional. With its productive power, it gives birth to the whole world and with its fascinating power, it fastens the *jeeva* (soul) with the thread of *moh*, i.e., attachment. He views the world full of *maya* and *moh* which are the roots of troubles :

*Maya and Desire are troubles of the world : but no one thinks so of this.*

Owing to its bewitching character, Kabir finds himself in a perplexed state and says, "Tell me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya ?" So far as the relationship between *jeeva* (soul) and *maya* (worldly illusion) is concerned, it can be contended that *maya* (worldly illusion) is a chain hypnotizing all the *jeevas* (souls) to it due to their ignorance. Kabir comprehends, "It is as the light and you as the moth". Man enjoys this relationship with *maya* (worldly illusion) as the "insect of the *nim* tree loves the juice of the/*nim* : so the fool says poison is Amrit." In fact, the relationship of life and *maya* (worldly illusion) is like a tree and its shadow. As soon as life vanishes, the bonds of *maya* (worldly illusion) are also unbraced.

"Kabir differentiates the two kinds of *maya* from each other by calling them *avidhya maya* and *vidhya maya*. *Avidhya maya* is further divided into two parts-*moti* (thick) *maya* and *jheen i* (thin) *maya*". He calls them *karm* and *bharam*, i.e., deed and illusion. Through the term *bharam*, Kabir wishes to convey disorders of heart, false knowledge, ignorance, etc. Longing, craving, desire, anger, greed, attachment, ego, etc. are the root causes of ignorance. Though this kind of *maya* is very cellular, nevertheless, it is very powerful. Kabir says that only the devotees of extraordinary nature can escape the evil effects of *maya*.

Kabir interprets *moti* (thick) *maya* in the form of *karmas* (deeds). It includes money, estate, status, *kanak* (gold), *kamini* (female), etc. He deprecates this kind of *maya* and believes that it is arduous to withdraw oneself from it:

*In the flame of Maya the whole world burns : they dote on gold and women.*

*Kabir says, How can you be saved when the fire is wrapped in cotton?*

*Vidhya maya* is described as the power of *Brahma* (the creator; one of the trinity in Hindu mythology) but He himself is not attached to it. It helps the saints in meeting with the Almighty. But it can be attained only after deep devotion.

Kabir believes that there is a close affinity between the heart and *maya* (worldly illusion). The five mental disorders are the companions of *maya* and only a healthy heart can evade their contagious effect. Owing to this reason only, saints lay emphasis upon the concentration of mind. It is through constant devotion that heart is exerted and mental disorders are perfunctorily remedied.

Since the goal of a mystic is the union with the Supreme, it is essential to remove all the obstacles which create

hindrances in the form of *maya* or the worldly ties. It is to attain that state in which there remains no difference between the two; the soul, being a part of the immortal Supreme, also becomes immortal. Kabir is confident of his immortality, "I shall not die even if the whole world dies/as I have attained the fellow to make me alive". It will not be out of place to quote the words of a Persian poet to depict the goal of a mystic's journey:

*When in (essence) is not called two my attributes are hers, and since we are one her outward aspect is mine.  
If she is called, 'tis I who answer, and I am summoned she answers him who calls me and cries labbayak (At the service)*

*And if she speak 'tis I who converse likewise if I tell a story 'tis she that tells it.*

*The pronoun of second person has gone out of use between us and by its removal I am raised above the sect who separate.*

Indeed, it is the perfect state in which discrimination between the two souls is impossible and this 'removal of the second person pronoun', *i.e.*, the state of unification is the goal of a mystic for the attainment of which various paths and stages have been suggested by different critics and philosophers. The study of this path, in the poetry of Kabir, can be outlined in six stages as given below

1. Awakening of the Self
2. Purgation : the state of search and effort
3. Illumination : a glimpse of unification
4. Dark Night of soul : the state of purification
5. Pre-phase of union
6. Unification.

### **Awakening of the Self**

Leaving out the exceptional cases, it can be commented that the journey of a mystic begins with an ardent inquisitiveness to know the Real. While leading an ordinary life in this world and enjoying worldly pleasures, there comes a juncture when the soul becomes conscious of some higher reality, some perennial pleasure, some perpetual peace and the search for the Ultimate Reality begins. As it is stated before that everything happens with His Grace only, this consciousness must also be taken as the benevolence of the Almighty. With His grace Kabir becomes aware of the darkness and dimmers of the world and strives for the shelter of the Almighty. The poet avows :

*All my life, I saw for myself,  
Whole of world is dark and dim,  
Says Kabir, do take shelter of God  
You shall not return earthward again.*

This consciousness leads the soul to search for a real *Guru* (guide). There is a dire need of real *Guru* (guide) and a deserving disciple for attaining substantial spiritual gains or the apple cart of aspirations may be upset. Kabir says :

*When his Guru is blind, what can the disciple do?  
The blind urges on the blind, both fall into the well.*

The essential factor to kindle the spiritual spark in the heart is love and it is the *Guru* who bestows this element to the soul. Kabir got devotional love and *Rama-Rasayan* (spiritual wine) through his guide to whom he ever remained indebted.

In fact, the soul is awakened with the help of *Guru* only. When he gives a *mantra* (incantation) to his disciple, he inclines towards the search of reality. He gets the ability to discriminate between various contradictory objects, *i.e.*, *sat* and *asat* (truth and falsehood), the Real and the unreal, pleasure and pain, eternity and transitoriness, etc. This state is characterized in the poetry of Kabir through his pronouncement that the light of knowledge bestowed by the *Guru* made him follow the right path by renouncing the path of evil.

The grace of *Guru* (guide) awakens the soul and starts considering *Govind* (Lord) as the only reality. In this way *Guru*, who works as a mediator between the soul and God, finally brings about their union. That is why, Kabir considers *Guru* greater than even *Govind* (Lord). It is only by virtue of his kindness that the soul identifies the illusive nature of *maya* (worldly illusion). Man, under the effect of illusion and ignorance, is like a moth making continuous bids to mount the lamp of *maya* and meets his fatal end, *i.e.*, death. The thought of

death makes Kabir's soul restless as he takes cognizance of wasting precious life in worthless deeds. His highly worried heart makes him raise a query :

*When will you start*

*Meditating the Almighty Lord,*

×      ×      ×      ×      ×      ×

*In play with friends you spent your childhood*

*In youth. a prey to lust*

*In old age weakness overtook you*

*Lost your heydays all.*

*Lost sight that body is all false*

*And death was the certain end;*

*Says Kabir, do listen all wise men*

*Forget not your transience here.*

Being awakened, Kabir intends to enlighten others too. He utters

*O visitor, do wake up!*

*Why are you so much in slumber?*

*You have yet to go far my friend*

*Do not lose your senses sleeping!*

### **Purgation: The state of search and effort**

Mystics have been recognised as the highest saviours of the world. The contention is based on perhaps the preaching nature of mystics who, after attaining perfect knowledge, develop this attitude in them. On the one hand, they construe the transience of this world, and, on the other side, they put emphasis upon rectitude. Kabir firmly believes that by abnegating *kama* (sensual pleasure), *krodh* (anger), *trishna* (craving), one can certainly meet the Almighty.

Since there is no certain device which can be used for the purification of self, every individual adopts a different path for it. Instead of emphasizing any theory in particular, Kabir talks about morality in this regard. He tells us about the advantages of *satsangti*, i.e., good company, which is always essential as it definitely casts its inescapable effect upon an individual. It transforms a man into an individual with *sanmati* (good sense). In one of his couplets, he tells us that it is the power of *satsangati* (good company) that changes even a *neem* (the margosa tree) plant into a sandal tree.

*Says Kabir, the company of the saint*

*Never goes in vain*

*Bitter "neem" near sandal plant*

*Becomes sandal, not "neem" again.*

The outer objects of the world exert a tantalizing impact upon an individual while the attainment of the goal of mystic journey is possible only by controlling the senses. Kabir tells us that only through the slow and steady pursuit of devotion, man can be abreast with the Supreme. The process of taming the senses is very difficult and Kabir prescribes *prapatti*, i.e., elusive devotion, the easiest way to attain this end. He says that we should abnegate all the doubts of the heart and start bhajan-chanting devotional songs which make us seek the grace of the Supreme. It is the utter humility of Kabir that he views himself as the 'dog' of Rama as a mark of his deep devotion.

Knowledge is also an important factor in this regard. Without a duststorm of knowledge, the shade of doubts can never be dispelled. Knowledge facilitates an individual with the capability of listening to *anahad nad* (a particular sound that is heard during the journey of consciousness) which drives off *trishna* (craving). Besides the importance of knowledge, Kabir also lays stress upon the importance of devotional love which he terms as a heaven for all the *bhaktas* (devotees). All these ways are like the small tributaries flowing towards the main river of yoga and love which are the most effective and significant elements of Kabir's emotiveness.

Love is such an essential factor of Kabir's life and poetry that he compares a heart without love with a graveyard. Again he says that it is like a piece of flesh in the house of a blacksmith. Love purifies the soul

enabling an individual to attain perpetual pleasure and peace. Like *Sufis* (a sect of Muslim saints), Kabir emphasizes the significance of virtuous love and maintains that life without love is futile.

The summit of love-based devotion can be viewed in the form of marital love which is expressed through various symbols by Kabir in his poetry. There is an abundant use of such symbolic expressions of love in Kabir's poetry. "Young bride!/do sing the welcome song", "O my love! do come to my hut" and "The Lord is my Love, O friend/, Lord Hari is my Love" are some of the beautiful symbols expressing mystic love. As a lover, Kabir also values and deeply understands the prick of separation. Various inner states like love's insatiety, aspiration, agitation, guilt, helplessness, doubts, oblivion, pleasure and pain, etc. have been penetrated minutely in Kabir's poetry.

The ideal of his love is *sati* (a loyal woman) and *sura* (a brave man) whose qualities are elaborated in his poetry. It is expressed through symbols and metaphors. His love is filled with intoxicity, enchantment and fascination, at the same time, it also requires the spirit of extreme sacrifice and penance, deep devotion and complete surrender. He does not consider love a child's game and says that only a fellow who has prepared himself for rigorous devotion, can enter the house of love. Kabir utters

*Kabir this is love's house dear*

*Not house of aunt*

*Only who doth his head surrender*

*Can enter the house, others not.*

In the path of this love man has to fight the evil forces enforcing the viciating effect of senses. A fellow possessing the attributes of a chaste and loyal woman, will emerge victorious in this battle of love which requires knowledge coupled with devotional love. A true devotee wishes to sacrifice all that he possesses. The fear of death cannot frighten him owing to his intense urge to attain the supreme pleasure after death. Like a *sati*, when a devotee's heart becomes fully engrossed in the Almighty, the difference between the two vanishes. Kabir depicts his devotion, purity and penance-based quality of love towards the Ultimate. Indeed, his love is ineffable and pure.

Another important way of self-purification propounded by Kabir can be viewed through *yoga*. The literal meaning of the term *yoga* is 'to add up' or 'to unite'. Thus the spiritual or physical devotion through which the soul is united with the Supreme, is *yoga*. It is considered successful when the soul, eradicating the impressions of *maya* upon it, comes to understand the ultimate truth and absorbs in the Almighty through *samadhi* (meditation).

There are various kinds of yoga, viz., *Jnanayoga*, *Rajyoga*, *Hathyoga*, *Mantrayoga*, *Karmayoga*, etc. (different practices of *yoga* leading to unification with the Ultimate through knowledge, concentration, corporeal discipline, remembering the Lord and detached actions respectively) which are different ways of attaining the same secret goal.

Through the gradual increase of knowledge, the soul becomes oblivious of its existence and the prick of separation is increased. It views the Almighty in every particle of the universe. Thus both attain unexplainable unity which is *Jnanayoga*.

In *Karma yoga*, the soul mingles with the Supreme through the deeds done with *nishkam bhav*, i.e., detached feelings. *Mantrayoga* denotes that through regular remembrance of God or regularly chanting a particular line in His praise, the soul absorbs in Him through *dhyana*, i.e., speculation. The way of unification through controlling body organs and breath and transacting them in an appropriate way is known as *Hathyoga*. According to *Rajyoga*, unification with the Supreme can be attained through constant concentration on the Divine Light. In fact, *Hathyoga* and *Rajyoga* are inter-related as it is essential to control body organs (theory of *Hathyoga*) to tame the heart (theory of *Rajyoga*).

All the ways of unification of the soul and the Supreme mentioned above are directly or indirectly embodied in Kabir's poetry. Therefore, it reveals the impact of the various exercises of *yoga* to some extent on him, though there is no clear indication of the poet's adherence to any such theory in particular. Like an essence-taker, Kabir extracted useful things from different theories and evolved a new system which may be known as



a project whose purpose is to provide an innate or natural tendency to the heart, mind and soul making them free from all illusions. Kabir's early poetry tells us that in the beginning he was definitely impressed by *Hathyoga* (stoic theory) which was a popular methodology adopted by most of the sages at this time.

He stresses upon the spiritual bath at a three-dimensional place where *ida*, *pingla* and *sushumna* (three important nerves) conjoin. He says "Mind bathes at the meeting point of three nerves (nadis), viz. the *ida*, *pingla* and *sushumna* and sees the one unperceivable Absolute". Describing the way of the soul's elevation, Kabir says, "Sun (breath of right nostril) got absorbed in Moon (breath of left nostril) and lastly both made one house i.e., entered in *Sushumna*". Kabir further holds:

*O Avadhu! make thy residence in the firmament where there is always rain of nectar and enjoys bliss by drinking it through back passage and by pressing the middle point of body between the anus and scrotum (performing moolbandha) Tadagi-Mudra is created and the vital airs have all gone to the brain (sky) and the sushumna has become active by the fire kindled by burning sex-passion (kama) and anger (krodh) and the serpent power (Jogin or Kundalini) has been aroused. Mind stuff has been restrained and is in the main market now calmly enjoying the taste of nectar. The unbeaten sound has begun and all the doubts are removed.*

In this way, Kabir's relationship with the theories of asceticism is not ignorable. But a deep study of his poetry tells us that he judged the inappropriateness of *hathyoga* (stoic theory) and left it very soon. At this juncture, he added the concept of love to yoga. Assigning a better place to love-devotion than stoic theories, Kabir propounded a new theory of love-devotion with the help of complete single-minded devotion and brought out its simple form for the betterment of the masses.

As soon as, Kabir moved ahead on the path of obscure unity with the Almighty through devotional love, he became disinterested in the piercing technique of *chakras* (cardinal plexus) of *hathyoga* (ascetic theory) and its various ostentations. Here, Kabir propounded the theory of *Shabd Surat Yoga* [a kind of *yoga* in which the spirit has to be united with the *anahad* and (a particular sound heard during the journey of consciousness) of its inner self which arises continuously in it]. This was the stage when Kabir detached himself completely from *Hathyoga*. In this way, "starting from *ingla-pingla* and passing through *asaan* and *pranayam*, Kabir concentrated on *trikuti* and attained the stage of *Mantra Yoga*". At this point he emphasized the importance of *ajapjap* (a natural way of remembering Lord wherein neither the tongue nor the lips move nor any sound is produced in it) and *sumiran* (reciting the name of Lord) which are very close to *Sahaj Yoga* (a kind of *yoga* that puts emphasis upon steady conversion of sensual pleasures instead of the subjugation of senses). Considering *Sahaj Yoga* as the best mode of concentration and contemplation, Kabir suggests, "O Sadhu, / In a simple manner cleanse yourself".

*Sahaj Yoga* is a kind of *yoga* in which a devotee does not need to make undesirable efforts to meet Him. In Kabir's *sahaj yoga*, there is no need of suppression or oppression of senses. It is known as *sahaj* because every moment man can devote himself to Rama, the deity. While performing worldly duties, man does not forget or become oblivious of the Supreme. This is the easiest form of *yoga* in which emphasis is laid on the taming of the heart and the senses.

If we try to establish a relationship between Kabir's poetry and various other theories of *yoga* of his age, it can be stated that neither the *Yogasutra* of Patanjali nor *Shivsahita* nor *Hathyoga Pradeepika* will suffice to provide a clue to a proper understanding of Kabir's *yoga* philosophy as none of them has touched the height of Kabir's love. Indeed, Kabir's concept of *yoga* is much related to devotional *yoga* of Guru Gorakhnath (Head of *Nathpanth*) which too lacks in that tender, melodious touch of love which is easily detectible in Kabir. Thus Kabir's *yoga* is a beautiful blend of various yogic theories culminating into his own theory which can aptly be termed as *bhakti-yoga* (devotional *yoga*).

Kabir's *yoga* seems to have undergone a continuous change as it journeyed a long distance from "*Hathyoga* to *Layayoga*, from *Layayoga* to *Sahaj yoga* and from *Sahaj yoga* to *Mantra yoga*. Again this *Mantra yoga* is developed as *Sahaj yoga* and at last it was termed as *Bhakti-Yoga*".

In this way, Kabir's poetry brings forward numberless ways of purification of the self, yet the most significant among them all is his devotional love. He avows :

*Shed all your doubts and strife of mind  
Take the Lord's Name with love-devotion  
Salvation will be yours for ever.*

### **Illumination : a glimpse of unification**

The stage of purgation mentioned in the preceding pages is not only a gateway to the illumination of the soul and the self but also an ascending to the divine aura. Kabir is dazzled to have a sight of the eternal light. He perceives the place of his Lord illumined without the sun or the moon. There is "no beginning nor middle nor end" to that region. Neither death nor disease nor any other calamity exists there. Kabir delineates :

*There is no land nor sky there*

*Nor Sun or Moon in that country,*

×      ×      ×      ×      ×      ×

*With Eternal brilliance is that land lighted;*

×      ×      ×      ×      ×      ×

*There is no beginning nor middle nor end*

*Nor death or disease exist at all;*

Kabir is thrilled to envision the light hovering all around. In his attempt to explicate the lusture of the Lord, he compares it with "a million suns". :

*A million suns are ablaze with light,*

*The sea of blue spreads in the sky,*

×      ×      ×      ×      ×      ×

*Rains pour down without water, and  
the rivers are streams of light.*

Having a glance of that splendid region through meditation, Kabir believes that each and everything of the universe can be viewed in the body itself, but it is essential to be blessed with the grace of Guru and shu 1fve distortions. Kabir sketches a beautiful picture of the presence of *brahmand* in *pind*, i.e., the reflection of the universe viewed in the body.

*In this body is the celestial park*

*And therein the Lord Almighty!*

*In this body are the seven seas*

*And all the nine lakh stars;*

*In this body are all gems and diamonds*

*And the tester thereof too.*

*Here the celestial music swells*

*Springs gush here everywhere.*

The spiritualistic magnetism blended here is termed as Kabir's illumination in which nothing else but only silvery encircling remains between the yogi in Kabir and the targeted penetration of point. This mystic allurements brings the poet close to the unification along with the brightest floating of the highest stream of consciousness. Here lies the glory of all the stages ascended by a devotee in order to attain *sahaj samadhi* and bathe in the rays of the illumined inward glory. While being at this stage, the devotee automatically recognizes its spiritual identity : though, on the other hand, the worldly existence prevails as such. To Kabir, this is the stage, wherein a new span of mystic experiences starts expanding and a unique and highly subjective leading towards the "Dark Night of soul" begins.

### **Dark Night of Soul**

The state of pleasure and joy attained through constant contemplation under the stage of illumination, does not last long as, at times, it is disturbed by the interception of *maya* (worldly illusion).

Kabir describes *maya* in various peculiar terms. He depicts it as a wicked lady with the five distortions, i.e.,

*kama* (desire), *krodh* (anger), *moh* (attachment), *lobh* (greed), *ahankar* (ego) as her sons who make everybody dance to their tunes. *Maya* ensnares a man in various ways. She entraps all the human beings, but is afraid of saints who cause a crushing defeat to her in most of the cases. Even if she somehow succeeds in entangling them, she has to leave the scene because of the *Guru's* scare.

When *maya* impels a devotee away from partial experiences, he becomes restless due to the anguish of separation. In fact, the element of separation is a significant factor in the devotion of a mystic. While expounding its significance, Kabir asserts that *virah* (prick of separation) of God should not be equated with the *virah* of this world as this *virah* (separation from God) in itself is a form of Lord. The poet personifies the *virah* and depicts it giving command in the following manner :

*"Biraha" calls out to Kabir and says*  
*Don't you leave me alone*  
*I will take you within the Lord's rays*  
*And leave you on your own.*

Therefore, the anguish of *virah* should not be condemned. *Virah*, the purifier of a man's soul, is the easiest way to attain the Almighty while leaning towards worldly pleasures lead him astray from that path. That is why, a real devotee considers it better to renunciate the worldly involvements and absorbs himself in the service of the Supreme even during the phase of separation. Without weeping and crying, a devotee can never attain his Rama, *i.e.*, the Lord.

Kabir depicts this stage of the soul in a very effective language. Each state of a separated soul, *i.e.*, agitation, filthiness, quivering, insanity, anxiety, annoyance, helplessness, perplexion, confusion and restlessness, etc., is penetrated minutely.

Kabir's separated soul seeks information about her Lover from every passenger. She addresses her Rama who has been the object of her concern for a long time. Her heart is restless and it craves for Him. Kabir can be seen making all possible efforts to meet his Rama or even for a glimpse of Him. He wishes to set himself ablaze so that the sky is covered with the smoke of his body and his Lover (Rama) may have pity on him and the agony of separation may be mitigated or removed completely through His kindness.

In a very famous stanza, Kabir's soul complains to the Supreme that everybody considers her to be His wife but He does not care for her. He contends that there is no use of this kind of relationship between the lover and the beloved unless both are united :

*My body and mind are grieved*  
*for the want of Thee;*  
*O my Beloved ! come to my house.*  
*When people say I am Thy bride, I am*  
*ashamed; for I have not touched*  
*Thy heart with my heart.*  
*Then what is this love of mine ? I have*  
*no taste for food, I have no sleep;*  
*my heart is ever restless within*  
*door and without.*  
*As water is to the thirsty, so is the*  
*lover to the bride. Who is there*  
*that will carry my news to my Beloved ?*  
*Kabir is restless : he is dying for sight of Him.*

The use of language in the above lines though in translations clearly exhibits the intense agony and prick of separation. He has deployed this picture to denote the state of hope and wait.

The mere recognition of its enemies, *i.e.*, the five distortions (*kama*, *krodh*, etc.) and *maya* impels the soul to launch its spiritual battle against them. The devotee fixes the goal of his life to remove all the obstacles. At this juncture, all the doubts are dispelled and the devotee asserts firm faith in the Supreme. The soul wishes to attain victory upon these enemies as it is the only source of attaining the everlasting oneness. Being inconsiderate of death, the soul views it as a source to attain the eternal pleasure.

Thus on one hand, the devotee wishes to absolve himself by the prick of separation, while, on the other side, he emerges victorious upon his senses. Thereafter, he circumscribes the path of exclusive devotion with single-mindedness. Kabir seems to be familiar with the significance of this oneness which has been highly emphasized in the scriptures of ancient India. That is why, he urges others also to leave all the doubts and seek the shelter of the Almighty by remembering only Him. At the extreme of his devotion, Kabir finds himself as the slave to Lord Rama and wishes to be disposed of according to His desire. His heart, mind and soul are for Rama only.

### **Pre-phase of Union**

In this way, owing to its victory upon both *maya* (worldly illusion) and the petty desires of this world and complete surrender to the Supreme, the soul succeeds in acquiring a proper position in the realms of the spiritual world. It is filled with the light of knowledge and becomes face-to-face with the enlightened Supernatural Power. "Millions of suns are shamed by the / radiance of a single hair of His/body". He further contends that he catches a glimpse of light without the sun and the moon. The light which he perceives is infinite giving the impression of a constellation of stars, though it is not the point where the soul merges into the Supreme.

While respecting the Indian traditions and values, Kabir has not shown union without marriage. Hence, the preparation of marriage with the Supreme begins. During this stage, instead of seeking the house of her father, the soul craves for the husband's abode for her own betterment. The domain of her husband is splendid, while the only way leading to the husband's home is through *bhajan* (reciting the name of Lord). It is majestically kindled with the lunar and the solar lamps.

It is the state wherein *virhani* (the separated soul) dreams of her union with the Lord. In fact, assumption of love is more melodious and sweet than the union itself. Kabir has portrayed the inner state of the beloved in categorical terms when the soul thinks, "I am not able to understand how He will behave with me"<sup>48</sup>, a fear, because of which she undergoes the trauma of tremendous shivering day and night.

There are numerous detailed references to the encounter between the soul and the Supreme in the works belonging to ancient Indian literature. With the *darshna* (holy glance) of the Almighty, the tissues of attachment are lacerated. All the doubts become baseless and futile and the web of *karmas* (deeds) is dismantled. Kabir, too, depicts that with union of soul and the Almighty, the soul becomes blessed and it gets absorbed in the ocean of pleasure day and night.

### **Unification**

The last stage in the journey of a mystic's life is that of unification. Kabir has put to use vigorous and virile language to reveal this state. With the help of symbols related to conjugal love, Kabir's expression becomes highly touching, striking, impressive and effective. The poet projects himself as a bride while he lends the status of a bridegroom to his Rama. Kabir does not forget referring to various rituals performed in marriage while describing it in his poetry. He deems himself to be a *dulhan*, i.e., bride, and says that she should chant benedictory recitations as Lord Rama has arrived at her place as husband. Imparting an extraordinary character to the union of the soul and the Supreme and considering it much different from an ordinary marriage, Kabir recounts it in a superb figurative language

*Young bride*

*do sing the welcome song !*

*My Love has come to my hut today*

*in procession of the elements five.*

*He is my honoured guest tonight*

*my youth and love are willing up*

*I shall cling to Him to body and mind.*

*My body I shall cause to be the altar*

*where Brahman will chant the Vedas*

*and with my Love and I shall go round the round*

*the sacred fire*

*to celebrate my wedding with Him !*

*Gods and goddesses and countless sages*

*have come from far to see the wedding*

*Says Kabir-O my luck !  
I am going to wed my dear  
Love The Lord Supreme !*

Thus it is the initial stage of a soul's union with the Almighty where her friends (other souls) inspire her to be happy as Lord Rama Himself has come to wed her. The soul is overwhelmed with happiness because of the advent of her Rama and other distinguished and gracious guests. Even *Brahma* (the Creator) himself is chanting *mantras* (Vedic hymns). The soul enjoys the state of blessedness on her marriage with an immortal entity, i.e., God. Kabir's description denotes this union as strange and the soul gets an ineffable pleasure through it.

Adding another dimension to the spiritual marriage, Kabir maintains that, as the newly married soul is ignorant, she finds the path leading to union with the Ultimate absolutely different from the normal one. She also experiences that the path is difficult to tread. With many efforts she reaches there, but now her *ghunghat*, i.e., veil is an obstacle in the way of direct meeting. As the marriage is a spiritual one, the face veil is not of cloth but of *karmas* (deeds) and illusions. Her friends prompt her, "Remove the veil / you will meet your gracious Lord." In the end, the soul attains her love and it manifests its joy in terms of the following musical outburst :

*I shall sing the welcome song  
steeped in the Nectar of His Name  
My Lord, my Love, He has come !  
My heart is shinning in His glow  
I shall place Him on the throne there.  
My precious Love I have got today !  
without my effort it is all His grace  
my Love, my Ram put the consort's mark  
on my face.*

In this way, Rama bestows His company to the soul irrespective of her undeserving efforts. Avowing her devotion to Him obsequiously, she implores Him to lend immortality to her love. She prays to the Supreme to dwell in the temple of her heart forever. In this way, after enjoying the taste of Nectar, the soul tries to make it everlasting. Thus this union comes up as a glorified one with the help of marital symbols.

After marriage, the soul gets absorbed in the Supreme and loses its individual identity. Monism or absence of duality is a very popular belief of almost all the religions. Kabir describes this monistic state through the symbol of a drop and the ocean. As the drop loses its separate identity after merging into the ocean, in the same way, the soul loses its separate existence after meeting Him. In the poetry of Kabir, the absorption of individuality has been unfolded in numberless ways, yet its emotional description is marvellous and matchless. When the lover and the beloved are unified, there remains no difference between the two. If the Lover (Supreme) dies, the beloved (soul) will also die, otherwise she, like her Lover, will remain immortal. Since 'Hari' is immortal and universal, there is no question of the soul being subject to death. The poet elucidates that he will not die even if the whole world dies as he has got his Lord to bestow him immortality. Thus death can never take him away.

In this way, the poetry of Sant Kabir brings forth varied stages of soul's journey towards the Supreme, among which significant ones are awakening of the soul, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul, pre- phase of union and finally, unification.

The terminology used in the description of all these stages is a mixed version of various languages spoken in the age of Kabir. It is called *saddhukari*, i.e., the language of saints which is open to all other dialects and slangs. Basically, the language of his poetry is Hindi influenced by various regional languages like Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Punjabi and the Hindi spoken in eastern states. The terms of Urdu and Persian are also used in the poetic outpourings of Kabir. Addressing to the common masses of his age, Kabir never paid heed to ameliorate or polish his language. Nowhere he seems to be following rules and regulations of grammar. One can easily comprehend the colloquial touch throughout his poetry. The beauty of his language is enhanced with the frequent use of idioms and phrases. Being open to all the language, Kabir's phraseology, at times, embraces the vocabulary of *yogis* (ascetics). It also reveals the influence of the *Siddhas* and the *Nathas*. Their

influence can be viewed upon his mode of expression too as in *Ulatbansiyan* he makes an abundant use of paradoxes and it becomes away from the easy access of a scholar. Truly, his language is in complete harmony with his thought. At times, it does not appear to be literary because the poet never considered it essential and did not strive for it. His language is successful in attaining its basic concern, i.e., striking the very idea conveyed through the group of words.

In order to establish Sant Kabir as a mystic poet, it can be stated that he never followed or presented any steadfast theory or philosophy for union with the Almighty. His poetry unfolds various paths to be united with the Supreme and the reader is free to choose one according to his capability and convenience. He considers that the path of love-devotion and complete surrender is the best and the easiest to attain unification with the Lord.

To depict his unification with his Lord, Kabir uses a versatile language which is called *saddhukari* open to many other dialects and vernaculars. The dominance of colloquial terms and day-to-day usages make his poetry close to the masses. He is a believer of monism, but from the point of view of a commoner, we find the traces of the relationship of *bhakta* (devotee) and *bhagwan* (Supreme) in his poetry. Indeed, all is subtle and mystic as he himself says "Nobody understands the state when Kabir and Rama, bhakta and bhagwan are united." Moreover, Kabir's mystic poetry apart from his didactic tone and candid communication as a social reformer, need not be measured in any perspective other than the unification, oneness and embodiment with his Lord, the Supreme.

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