



Relevance of Kabir Das's Poetry in the Modern World

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Authors

Ankita Mishra

Research Scholar

Department of English

Jai Prakash University

Chhapra, Bihar, INDIA

Dr. Amar Nath Prasad

Professor and Head

Department of English

Jai Prakash University

Chhapra, Bihar, INDIA

Abstract

Kabir's poetry is timeless because it speaks directly to the human heart. Though he lived centuries ago, his verses still shine with freshness and truth in the modern age. Kabir was a saint poet who rejected empty rituals and divisions of caste and creed. He spoke in the language of ordinary people, using simple images from village life, weaving, farming, and nature. His words remind us that God is not found in temples or mosques alone but in the purity of the heart and in the honesty of one's actions. In today's world, where people are divided by religion, politics, and material desires, Kabir's poetry becomes a guiding light. His call for unity, simplicity, and love of truth is more relevant than ever. This paper explores how Kabir's verses can inspire modern society to overcome hatred, greed, and hypocrisy, and how his spiritual vision can help us live with peace and harmony.

Key Words

Kabir, Poetry, Spirituality, Cultural Relevance, Modern World, Simplicity, Bhojpuri Tradition.

India is a great country of various religions, sects, classes and creeds. People hailing from different corner of this great land possess different ideas, visions inherited from their rich past and convention. In order to make India great in philosophical, practical and literary field, the contribution of great saints is unforgettable. This teaching is life making and character building. Kabir Das is such a great saint whose teaching and preaching are very relevant and remarkable even today in this age of materialistic world. The works of Kabir Das are abundant with the great philosophy of life which need to be explored and analyzed at present time when the whole world is passing through the waves of confusion, dilemma and contrast. People today look very smart outwardly but inwardly they are rotten to the core.

In this age of moral and spiritual breakdown, the poems of Kabir Das act like a nourishing balm on the wound of so-called modern men. His poems are very philosophical as well as practical. A thorough and contextual analysis of his poetry also shows its literary depth and intricacies which often attract the attention of the modern scholars.

Now let us see the interpretation of some of his philosophical poems which are often quoted at different places and different books by several writer and critics. His poetry shows a great light in the path of our dark forest of ignorance. Pranay rightly says:

Kabir strips away all our illusions. He makes us feel divine, even in the midst of all life-problems. He tells us that we are deluded beings who don't know all ones with God. That is our real problem. We must see the light, as Kabir says: "They are blind who hope to see it by the light of reason. That reason is the cause of separation. Hence, forget trying to understand truth by the limited mental constraints of yourself. See it though the intuitive eyes. Have faith have truly intuitive perception, and then you find the greater power within yourself." (Pranay, 53)

The total works of Kabir Das are so vast that it is very difficult to know its philosophical, practical and literary and lysis in a single paper. So for our convenience and practical point of view I have selected only those well quoted famous poems and couplets of Kabir which demand not only its philosophical and practical exploration but also its literary qualities. So now let us see some of his well-known mystic songs which contain both philosophy and literature.

The book "Mystic Songs of Kabir" contains some of his great songs which ridicule the ostentatious and outer ritualism and tell us to introspect our own self for the realization of the truth. One such poem is given below:

*Wherever do you save me man
I am close, quite close to you
Not in sacred place I am
Not in temple idols either
Not in solitary place I remain
I am close, quite close to you
I stay not in temple or in mosque
Nor in Kaaba or Kailash either
I remain close, quite close to you
Not in austerities, nor in meditation I am
Not in feastings or fasting either
Not in worships laid down by scriptures
Not in 'yogic' exercise, I am
I tell you man, if you seek me in earnest
I am by your side in trice.
Says Kabir, O Sadhu listen with care,
Where your faith is, I am there. (Das, G.N. 17)*

Here in this poem, Kabir Das has presented a great philosophy of life, that is, the knowledge of self-consciousness. This great philosophy is not new but it can be seen and realised after going through the religious pages of Vedas and Upanishads. The concept of "Soham", i.e. the inner being is equivalent to the immortal and external existence very much close to what Kabir Das present in this poem. As a matter of fact this philosophical truth presented in this poem has a very practical significant in today's world where man wants to have eternal peace and happiness; where man is constantly searching for his identity in the insensitive and adverse atmosphere; where man feels himself quite segregated and alienated from this outwardly frightful world. The poem also flings an irony on those hypocrites who perform rituals only for the sake of rituals. It is to be noted here that Kabir Das was never against the Sanatan Dharma or Hindu Dharma but he was against those rituals, conventions, customs and creeds which differentiate man from man and create unwanted bumps and obstacles on the smooth path of social progress. In his period there were so many types of sects and creeds which laid stress on the outward performance and rituals rather than focusing on our own self which

makes a man perfect. This is why here is the poem. He flings irony not only on Hindu religion but also the Islamic way of life.

So far as its literary aspects are concerned, it is full of beautiful images and symbols, fine rhyme and meaning. Here his language is very simple and lucid. Kabir Das strongly believes in the simplicity of language because he was the poet of the common people. His message is that the heart of all Beings is the true residence of God, neither the temple nor the Masjid, affirms sant Kabir. There is only one God Almighty. Kabir thinks that both Rama and Rahim are only different names of the one and same God Almighty of the universe. Sant Kabir affirms that God almighty is in every Being and thing of universe But, man seeks him here, there and everywhere like the fish remaining thirsty inside water. Man should try to find Him at home or within his own heart. Kabir asserts that man should take care of his mind and not his clothes in order to realize God.

It is interesting to note that the verse of Kabir is not only rich in philosophy but also in literature and art. Kabir often says that real truth is not utterable. He calls this *Akatha Katha*. Real truth is always within the depths of your heart. We must find an inner oneness with that truth. Kabir says: "All know that the drop merge into the ocean, but Few know that the ocean merges into the drop". In other words, most of us are looking at ourselves as limited human beings who are separated from God. But the realized one is the one who can see the oneness of the greater power, and two powers within oneself. Pranay rightly observes:

So the idea of Kabir is to make you pulsate to the greatness of energy of the divine as a living reality within yourself. This brings about bliss. This brings about potential realization. This brings about a great ability to express your innermost energies in a productive and creative manner because you start realizing your potential in its divine originality. You start giving up your identification with limitations and start identifying yourself with something greater. You identify with the unlimited. (Pranay, 55)

In one of his well quoted poems Kabir Das has satirized the caste system of India where the performance of man is mostly calculated on the basis of caste rather than contribution. Those who are the saints in the true sense of the term are beyond the sickle of caste and class. Kabir rightly says:

*It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs;
For the Priest, the warrior the tradesmen, and all the thirty-six castes, alike are seeking for God.
It is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint may be.
The barber has sought God, the washer women, and the carpenter
Even Raidas was a seeker after God.
The Rishi Swapacha was tanner by caste
Hindus and Muslim alike have achieved that end.
Where remains no mark of distinction.
(Tagore, Rabindranath, 2)*

The central theme of this poem is that caste is not an obstacle to visualize God. It also shows that for the priest, it is useless to ask for his caste. In order to interpret his point, Kabir Das has named some saints who belong to lower caste but visualize God through their inner consciousness. Poets like Raidas, Rishi Swapacha rejected religious boundary and had the visions of real truth through diving deep into that vast ocean of the soul and inner consciousness. As a matter of fact, Kabir proclaimed both Ram and Rahim are but different name for the same truth. According to his philosophy, God is formless, omnipresent and omniscient. True devotion surpasses temples, mosque and scriptures because the divine reside in ourselves. He was against the hollow rituals and blind faith. His poem often exposes the futility of ceremonial worship without love. According to Kabir the Satguru is the gateway to divine realization. Perhaps this is why in one of his couplets he places Guru above even God. Because the Guru awakens the soul and burns away ignorance. He strongly believe that without the guidance of true Guru, spiritual wander leads nowhere. Dr. Girija Saran Agrawal rightly observes:

Kabir is the name — of love. Kabir is the philosophy of unity and goodwill. Kabir is the adjective of a person who is free spirited, happy — go lucky and fearless. Kabir is the confluence of two cultures. The confluence of Kabir's philosophy has more depth than that of two rivers. Quran and Vedas are dissolved so well there that even the parting line has disappeared. Kabir is the path—of naturalness. A path that is spotless.
(Agraval, Girija Saran. 6)

It is interesting to note here that the poetry of Kabir Das is central to the modern world and civilization where the materialistic man is searching for his identity in an adverse atmosphere. Today we see that tragedy of a modern man is that the material benefits of the present scientific and technological age have overwhelmed the moral values by which he should have guided his life. Indeed, there has taken place an erosion of our value, consciousness, if not a deterioration of morality. The modern man caught in this cobweb has himself become a machine, though he is released from the obligation to conform to traditional standard and established values.

This Kabir Vani is highly devoted to the great significance of the Guru in life. The Guru who gives the shape of Pitcher that is his disciple. He says:

*Guru Kumhaar Shish Kumbha Hai,
Garhi – Garhi Kaarhai Khot.
Antar haath sahaar dai, Bahar mare chot. (Kabir Vani, 19)*

A Guru is like a potter and a disciple is like a pitcher. Like, a potter, in order to remove the defect of his pitcher gives support with one hand from inside and brings it in proper form, with the other hand, from outside, in the same manner a Guru also, imposing strict discipline on his disciple from outside and loving him from within his heart, removes all his defects.

A critical analysis of this couplet shows that Kabir Das has a kin sense of poetic sensibility and moral touch. His moral & spiritual presentation is not direct and monotonous rather they are richly mingled with the poetic flashes and an aesthetic touch. Here, the molding and building of the disciple has been metaphorically presented by the extended metaphor of making a earthen pot by a successful maker of a pitcher.

In one of the Sakhi's, Kabir Das has very connotatively presented an uninitiated person with the help of a powerful animal imagery. He is of the opinion that an uninitiated person never quit his habits. Kabir says:

*Saakat sookar kookara teeno ke gati aik
Koti jatan paramodhiye, Taoo na chchrai tek.
(Kabir Vani, 52)*

(An uninitiated person, a pig and a dog all three are alike. No matter what one may do, no matter what kind of knowledge is imparted to them to bring them on the right path, but hey never quit their habits i.e. they cannot be brought on the right path.)

It is interesting to note that Kabir Das emphasizes much on the unconditioned love and devotion to Guru because he very well knows that the realization of soul or inner consciousness can only be felt by the blessing of satguru.

Shanti Kumar Ghosh rightly observes:

The first realization, namely, the realization of the silent and timeless Brahman, is to be followed by the second one, namely, the realization of the cosmic consciousness and the vision of the Divine as all beings and as all that is. The third realization has been attained when Sri Aurobindo experienced on abiding (the supreme reality). Finally, there comes the descent of a super mind or eternal Truth – consciousness (which is above mind) into the physical. It is by this super mental descent that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. (Universal Values, 96)

Kabir's poetry continues to live because it touches the eternal truths of human existence. His songs are not bound by time or place; they belong to all ages and all people. In the modern world, where life is full of speed, competition, and confusion, Kabir's voice reminds us to pause and look within. He teaches that true religion is not in outer show but in inner purity. His verses against caste divisions and blind ritualism are lessons for a society still struggling with inequality and prejudice. His call for love and compassion is a medicine for the violence and hatred that surround us. Kabir's simple language and powerful images make his poetry accessible to everyone, whether scholar or common reader. He speaks of the weaving of cloth as a symbol of life, of the farmer's plough as a symbol of spiritual effort, and of the river as a symbol of the journey of the soul. These images are as fresh today as they were in his time, because they connect human experience with spiritual truth.

In the age of technology and globalization, Kabir's poetry reminds us of the importance of human values. His songs tell us that wealth and power are temporary, but truth and love are eternal. He inspires us to live with courage, honesty, and simplicity. His vision of unity beyond caste and creed is the need of the hour in a world torn by divisions. Kabir's poetry is not only a spiritual guide but also a social message, urging us to build a society based on equality and compassion. His words are like a mirror in which we can see our weaknesses and also our possibilities. They challenge us to rise above selfishness and to discover the divine within ourselves.

Conclusion

Thus, Kabir's poetry is deeply relevant in the modern world. It is a call to awaken the soul, to break the chains of ignorance, and to live a life of truth. His verses are not old songs of the past but living voices of the present. They remind us that simplicity is strength, that love is the highest religion, and that truth is the only path to freedom. In this way, Kabir continues to guide humanity, showing that the wisdom of a saint poet from centuries ago can still heal the wounds of today and inspire the dreams of tomorrow.

Bibliography

1. Agrawal, Girija Saran (2019). *Mahatma Kabir: His Life and Poetry*. Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi.
2. Das, G.N. (2003). *Mystic Songs of Kabir*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, P.17.
3. Das, Kabir (2024). *1008 Kabir Vani*. Compiled by Lal Chandra Doohan. Manoj Publication. New Delhi.
4. Ghosh, Santi Kumar (2004). *Universal Values*. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.
5. Pranay (2022). *Kabir: The Great Mystic*. Fingerprint, New Delhi.
6. Das, Kabir (1915). *Songs of Kabir*. Translated by Rabindranath Tagore. Macmillan, New Delhi, Reprint 2020.

---==00==---