

## Kabir's Contribution to Religion

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**Abstract:** *In this brief article it is proposed to present clearly and critically important contribution of the great poet philosopher Kabir. Though he is not a technical philosopher, yet his importance cannot be denied like of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and such others.*

**Keywords:** Kabir, Religion, Philosophy, Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

Before coming to his religious philosophy, it would be desirable to present a brief survey to his life and works. About Kabir's life there is some uncertainty and confusions. He himself was an unlettered person. He himself says –

“I touch not ink and nor paper,  
Nor take pen in my hand”<sup>1</sup>

However there is popular agreement among scholars that Kabir's newly born body was thrown into the pond at Lahartara near Varanasi and a Muslim weaver's woman found him and naturally Kabir was nursed by in that family. It may be mentioned here parents Niru and Lima, lived in Varanasi.<sup>2</sup> It is said that Kabir developed in that atmosphere but he was not destined to become a weaver. He did not take interest in usual works and was more interested in moral, spiritual and religious matters and contributed to development of spiritualism. It is well known that he was graced by a great spiritual saint, Ramananda. Kabir being confronted and touched by him started to adore him as Guru. Really his initiation was in unusual manner. But Kabir's firm faith resulted in his spiritual unfoldment and development.

In due course he became a great saint poet and it is further known that his devotion was centered round the Nirguna aspect of God. It may be further stated here that though Kabir and Tulsi both were influenced by Ramananda, they differed. Tulsi was interested in Sagun devotion and Kabir was interested in Nirguna devotion. Although one may not find real opposition between two types of devotion and this is also confirmed in recent time by the great philosopher saint Ramakrishna Paramhansa who is of the opinion that Brahman and Kali are one and the same. Here Sant Kabir also says that there is no difference between Nirgun and Sagun – “*Santondhokhakasukahiye, gun me nirgun, nirgun me gun hai bat chharkyonbahiye*”. Without going into these distinctions, it would suffice to mention here that Kabir though talks about Ram, is very emphatic that his Ram is personal Ram, who was not the son of Dashrath. So his approach is more universal and it may be remarked by the way of clarification that he seems to be naturally inspired by nondualistic Vedanta and that is why he seems to Ram developing the cults of Nirguna, the devotion of bhakti. But there is a difference between among scholars about his philosophy. Some describe him as theist whereas others consider him as monist. To quote following lines in support of the above view, “According to this writer, Kabir was neither a pantheist nor a monist but a theist. Philosophy was not an accomplishment of Kabir. In fact, he deprecated mere philosophical discussions which lead to nothing. But on the basis of some of Kabir's sayings like the above quoted ones in which he seems to have conceived to absolute identity between God and man, and his discussions on concepts like Sabda, Maya, etc., some writers, such as Ahmad Shah, find in his utterances the doctrines of monism.

However, the matter does not seem to be that easy to decide in either way exclusively.”<sup>3</sup> Really speaking, Kabir in his various writings discusses problems of philosophical importance. Though he is not a technical philosopher, yet he talks of God, World, Maya, Karma and such other allied themes. Really one can see his deep insight and his penetrating wisdom, if one goes to his works like *Bijak*, *Sabdhas*, *Sakhis*, *Belis*, *Birhuli*, *Hindolas*, *Kaharas*, *Basants*, etc.

Now coming to his approach to religion, his works clearly show that there are elements of nondualistic approach, theistic approach, mysticism, humanism, moralism and something like an intense urge for spiritual awakening in his various utterances which we find here and there in his writings. So far his contributions to the realm of religion are concerned it may be clearly seen that he does not feel happy and satisfied with prevailing religious practices both in Hinduism and Islam. He seems to be very much critical of ritualistic and mythological approaches to religion. He clearly criticizes ridiculous idol worship and such other allied practices. Similarly he also feels such in Islamic practices. In fact, he is very opposed to ceremonialism, ritualism and various practices based on superstitious and blind faith. He really exhorts people’s revolt against such practices, which have defied and defamed religion.

Saint Kabir strongly criticizes meaningless rituals and false beliefs. He says, “I have seen people practicing their religious disciplines, and bathing early in the morning. They kill living beings and worship the stones. They appear not to have any wisdom. I have seen many Muslim priests and holy men reading their Koran and holy books. They make disciples and teach them the way of sacrificing, according to their knowledge. The Hindu priests sit in various postures and pretend to meditate, but their minds are full of pride. They worship images made of brass and stones, and they pride themselves on their pilgrimages. The priests wear their particular caps and garlands, and wear their distinctive sandal paste marks on their body and forehead. They sing the Sakhi and Sabda but are lost, as they do not know the secret of soul. The Hindu says that Ram is dear to him, and the Muslim says that it is Rahiman. They fight among themselves and die and neither of them knows the secret of God. They wander house to house giving mantras (making disciples), and they pride themselves on their greatness.” And says, “Gathering some stones and pebbles you made a mosque and climbing on the top give azan in loud voice, Is Allah deaf?”<sup>4</sup>

He says, “The world dies of fasting, going for pilgrimage and bathing in secret water but without reciting Nam they would die again and again.”<sup>5</sup> For the false belief of sacrifice, pilgrimage and donations Saint Kabir says “Do not kill helpless beings, for they have same life force as you. The sin of killing will not be abolished, even if you listen to scriptures millions of times. These people go on pilgrimage with restless thoughts and thieving mind. The sins of none were removed but their mind was loaded with ten more.”<sup>6</sup>

Really, he bases religion on inner purity and moral virtues. He repeatedly talks about cultivation of moral virtues and sublime feelings like kindness and benevolence. He led stress on helping the needy and poor. Although he does not talk about humanistic ideals and moralistic approaches clearly and explicitly like Swami Vivekananda and others but one can see that there is a good deal of similarity between the two. Both champion the cause of suffering humanities. Both talk of the path of self-realization. They talk about Yoga in their own way. They, therefore, stand for rationalistic, synthetic and universalistic approaches to religion. In this context it may be justifiably observed that Kabir champions the cause of communal harmony and held that one should develop the attitude of love. He clearly utters that one can attain highest wisdom if one can know the word ‘Prem’ which is of two and a half letters. It is interesting to see that Swami Vivekananda also highlights the importance of role of religion of love on the basis of his philosophy of practical Vedanta. Kabir too promotes the law of love and seems to be out and out practical.

It is interesting to see that Kabir also tries to bring about many veritable reformations in religion in general and in Hinduism in particular. Various malpractices crept in the fold of religion, especially in Hinduism. Kabir revolts against them and opposes various practices like impolitic untouchability and exploitation in the name of religion. Kabir’s religion characterizes by concern for moral values as he seems to be interested in the fact that the religion should fulfill the highest purpose of human life i.e. self-

realization. All these lead to his rationalistic, moralistic and synthetic approaches to religion. That is why he is critical of all irrational and superstitious practices like idolatry and he is also critical of various social systems like self-system and many other practicing like bathing in Holy River. It is further interesting to see that he shows his concern for common and downtrodden persons. One can find one's reactions against priesthood and Brahmanism who exploit common men. All these tend towards his views to be humanistic and democratic in his philosophy of religion. What is more important in his approach is that he stands for harmony of religion particularly communal harmony. In this respect his role is comparable to that of Swami Vivekananda who also pleads for universalistic approach to religion. He was, therefore, a great integrator and exponent of communal harmony. To quote the following lines: -

“The greatest of all these mystics, who were products of an environment engendered by the interaction of two faiths, was Kabir of Banaras, North India. Kabir occupies 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.”<sup>7</sup>

In view of the above it can be observed that his philosophy of religion is of profound importance both from theoretical point of view as well as from practical angle of vision. His views are very much relevant even today as people sometimes are divided in the name of religion. Kabir's approach, therefore, can be quite useful in the better appreciation of religion in modern era.

#### **Reference:**

1. *Kabir, Bijak, Sakhis – 178*
2. *Abilash Das, KabirDarshan, P. 37.*
3. *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu – Muslim unity, Muhammad Hedayetullah, P. 215.*
4. *Kabir, Bijak, Sakhis– 20*
5. *Ibid. – 26*
6. *Ibid. – 212, 213*
7. *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu – Muslim unity, Muhammad Hedayetullah,. P. 1.*