

Afterword

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Pinnacle of Liberation: On a Philosophical Note

बुरा जो देखन मैं चला, बुरा न मिलिया कोय ।
जो दिल खोजा आपना, मुझसे बुरा न कोय ॥

Bura jo dekhe mai chala, bura na miliya koy,

Jo dil khoja apna, mujhse bura na koi

Kabir's poem (*doha*) could be read as follows: "When I tried to find the 'evil' in the outside world, I couldn't find any. But when I looked at the world inside me, I realised there is no one more evil than me". Kabirdas Jayanti was celebrated on the 24th of June this year. Particulars and knowledge about his birth and death, his religion, sect or time are still unknown. But Kabir is beyond all this. He is a beacon to all of us. He has always existed since centuries in the form of eternally veracious words. Many attempts have been made to interpret his couplets (*dohe*) but everytime one finds something new in them. With the increasing religious and social conflicts, the

significance of Kabir's dohe has gained more importance today than in the Middle Ages. Humans are becoming more distant from each other which has resulted in a debilitated state of our country. No one person or group is responsible for this. The priesthood in every religion has become aggressive. Not only the educational institutions, universities but also the economy and politics are under the control of priesthood. And the only solace in these times is Kabirdas.

The pinnacle of liberating philosophy

Kabir and I met through music. In the sixties, among the "lower" castes of Maharashtra, there was a congregation singing hymns of *Kabirpantha*. Especially in the settlements of the "social untouchables", at a funeral, during the Dashakriya ritual, the congregation sings these *bhajans*. I didn't understand those *bhajans* at that time, but I felt the music deep inside of me. The tunes of those *bhajans* were in raag *Bhairavi*. Their words were their strength. Their meaning differed from the communal *bhajans*. Those hymns were asking us a question. I don't know how they got there. They were not translated in a literal sense, but were rather interpretations of Kabir's philosophy. They had been passed on from generation to generation through oral traditions. *Ektar*, *dimdi* and *manjeera* were the only instruments used by the *bhajanis*. Kabir's lyrical singing was an enlightenment. It couldn't have been lost in the music. I was overwhelmed by how Kabir's *bhajans* had the power to captivate someone and make one interrogate the self. Kabir's questions about who I am, what is the purpose of my life, began to make me restless. They began to motivate me to find a direction in my Life.

I left the village and also lost my connection with Kabir. Later on in Mumbai, I found Kabir's music again. I heard the lyrics

of Kabir's hymns at a funeral at Bardana in Asalfa Village, Ghatkopar, and that is when I reunited with him. I wandered around looking for those congregations. I finally found them in a hilly settlement west of Ghatkopar. They had come to Mumbai from Jalna to start a life here. Some mended slippers on the street, and some were engaged in petty jobs. Some were also glass-scrap sellers. But, everyone practised the oral hymns of Kabir. I worked with them for six months. I learnt their hymns by assisting them in their work like carrying their harmonium and other instruments etc. This is when I actually understood Kabir. Asaram Umap, whom I met during my stay, is still in contact with me.

Kabir's works were non-vedic. He preached the lack of attachment and labour. His works were completely indigenous and born in the soil of this country. Its foundation was love. He questioned priests of all religions. His questions were deeper than theology.

मोको कहाँ ढूँढें बन्दे, मैं तो तेरे पास में, *Why are you looking for me elsewhere, when I am just there with you!* They conveyed this message of love. Although Kabir was a medieval saint, his vision was far ahead of his time. He asked priests of all religions. No one has yet been able to answer Kabir's life-threatening questions. Kabir asked them, "Tell me, where is your God?". They answered with theological prose, but could not answer this basic question of Kabir. Their philosophy was *mayavadi* whereas Kabir proposed the philosophy of love. In fact, Sant Namdeo, Sant Rohidas, Sant Mirabai along with Kabir all showed the right direction: The direction of love. They taught the language of humanity.

Kabira asked,

बमन हो के पुराण वाचे
तो क्या साहेब मिलता है?
हाथ में लकड़ी उलटी पकड़ी
तो क्या साहेब मिलता है?
मुल्ला होके बांग पुकारे
वोह क्या साहेब बहरा है?
मुंगी के पैर में घुंगरू बांधे
तो साहेब सुनता है
प्रेमभाव से ध्यान लगाओ
उसको साहेब मिलता है

*A Brahmin reads Puraan - Hindu holy books.
Does he find God?
Do you find God by holding a stick upside down?
A Mulla calls out his God loud in his prayers. Is God deaf?
If you tie ghungroo to even an ant's feet, God will listen to it.
One who concentrates on God with love, will find God.*

After listening to such intriguing works of Kabir, I reached out to his followers who sang Kabir all over the country. I met them, listened to their hymns. I got to learn more about Kabir from them. As Kabir and his work unfolded, so did his visions and his greatness. The time he was living in was not easy. In the Middle Ages, when love had just started to blossom, when rays of love were falling on this world, emerged the everlasting literature conveying the message of love. In a more real sense, love was yet to be emancipated in the world, but saints like Kabir knocked on the doors of the world for love in the Middle Ages.

Just as the Sufi tradition from the north had an effect on Kabir, so did Kabir on Sufis.

The mainstay of both was the same, that there is no God; human love is God. Any other God is the creation of the human being. The Buddha laid the foundation of the liberating philosophy of this world and saints like Kabir crystalized it.

Kabir continues to influence the liberating political-cultural movements. He put aside the soul and inculcated the values of love and compassion in human beings. His influence on the *Varkari* sect is evident. Kabir is found in the theology of Jyotirao Phule. He was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's *guru*. In today's situation, when the conflicts between castes and religions have intensified, the need for Kabir has increased immensely, in comparison to the Middle Ages.

Human beings are becoming more distant from each other resulting in the debilitated state of our country. No one person or group is responsible for this. The priesthood in every religion has become aggressive. Not only educational institutions and universities, but also the economy and politics are under its control. And the only solace in these times is Kabirdas.

The centers of knowledge in the form of universities are still hegemonized by the upper castes. Kabir's tradition is insignificant to them. For them, Kabir is a critique of the aesthetics of medieval language, an element of undignified ancillary to be put in literature. The philosophy of life of the lower castes, the oppressed, as stated by Kabir, is not yet the subject of their study. Before science was discovered, Kabir laid out the basic philosophy of life. He proved the folly of the established *Mayavadi* Vedic philosophy. As a result of this, Kabir and his works tend to be hidden from the outside world.

When the Gujarat riots broke out, we were looking for an effective medium. A platform that would seek to appeal to the minds of the people through the role of humanity. The idea was to affect people in ways beyond their caste and religion. Kabir was the only convincing answer, as a result of which the *Kabir Kala Manch* was founded. In this dogmatism and bigotry, Kabir, who embraces all religions and calls for humanity is the only true messenger of love.

Translated by Saumitra Joshi & Sonalee Gujar