

Bhakti Religion in India with Special Reference to Kabirdas

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ABSTRACT: The period in which Kabirdas was born came to be known as the beginning of ‘Bhakti Movement’ in India. The doctrines of Bhakti were preached by Ramananda but it was popularized by Kabirdas and his followers. Kabirdas was a Vaishnavite. He was deeply influenced by Nirguna Bhakti and he held high faith and respect for the truth beyond worldly affair. The basic teaching of each religion is to get united with the Supreme Soul by means of serving one’s fellowmen. Only a person who is true, selfless, tolerant and sympathetic at heart can think of the welfare of other people and serve the needy in want. These are basic features of humanism. A true Bhakta sees his God in each and every particle of this universe. He feels the Adored God’s presence everywhere. With the passage of time the power of Bhakti within the Bhakta enables him to see the world in the new light altogether. In this way he gets united with the Divine Soul. Kabirdas was an advocate of Bhakti dharma. He believed that arrogance and pride were hindrance in the path of getting united with the Divine Soul. Both the Haves and Haves Not in society were inspired by his teachings. No doubt the conservative society of his time created hurdles for him. But the universal humanistic appeal in Kabirdas’ teachings removed such hurdles and he bridged gaps between the Hindus and Muslims. His preachings and teachings brought an air of harmony in North India when communities experienced bitterness as far as social give and take was concerned. Kabirdas was such a devotee who thought of ‘Rama’ as his friend and spread the message of Bhakti and a secular religion in the society. He wanted to reform the society through the religion of Bhakti which may be acceptable for all people of different faiths.

KEY WORDS: *Bhakti, Divine, Nirguna, Rama, Religion, Soul, Vaishnava.*

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I. Introduction:

The main objective behind the Indian spiritual concept is to realise the Supreme Power behind the universe and the ultimate realization of being one with that Power. Each and every conscious individual can think of Indefinable Object which is far away from the physical reach of the human intellect and sensitivity. Every human being is unaware of What or Who mobilize and motivates the series of events happening in the universe. It is not known Who or What Power is behind the systematic direction of things and happenings in this universe. There is always a puzzling question in the human mind as to Who this might be and whether He or It is above the universe or not. Of and on a feeling arises in the human mind - there may be Someone, Something or Some practice above the universe. Why does such a thought come to the mind? The human mind and body is made up of such elements that the physical mental and supra-mental consciousness of man motivates man to think so. Every human civilization has a unifying force of unity. This force is understood from the Indian context as ‘Dharma’, while from the Western context as ‘Religion’. Both the term ‘Dharma’ and ‘Religion’ assume an important role being the foundation of the wholeness of every civilization. Religion is the direct experience of reality gathered after a posterior theory of knowledge. Dharma also aims at Eudaemonism or Perfectionism i.e., the realization of the self or the infinite in man, (*Atmanam Viddhi*). Man’s dharma is to become the infinite which he already is in potency¹. So every individual soul has a religious tendency. Man is a religious being. Religion began with the inception of human life in this world. Eating, sleeping, fearing and mating are four common principles of both animal and human lives. But man has the capacity to decide what the ultimate purpose of his life is. This ultimate purpose comes into human mind through religion and devotion or Dharma and Bhakti.

Kabirdas was one of the most famous authoritative persons of Nirguna sect of Bhakti age. He was a poor Julaha, a Mohammedan weaver of ancient Kasi, the modern Benaras². The period in which Kabirdas was born came to be known as the beginning of ‘Bhakti Movement’ in India. About 600 years ago Kabirdas was born in 1398 A.D. No such historical data is found which confirms the date of birth of Kabirdas. The only data that many scholars and researchers on Kabirdas has accepted to be authentic is a citation from a book named “Kabir Charitra Bodh”. There it has been mentioned –“There is a solitary book named Kabir Charitra Bodh (The knowledge of the deeds of Kabir) edited by Swami Yugalanand in 1905 which bears a reference to the date of

Kabir. 'On Jyestha Sudi Purnima on Monday in the Vikram Era of 1455, the light of the Satya Purush descended on the Lahara Tank in Kasi. At that time, the earth and the sky were filled with light.'³ Thus the Kabir Charitra Bodh gives 1455 V.E. or 1398 A.D. as the year of Kabir's birth. There is a traditional couplet (Doha) current among the Kabirpanthis: 'The year 1455 is passed. On Monday the glamour has come to stay. On Jetha Sudi Barsayat Purnima, he made his appearance'.⁴

Since his early childhood Kabirdas grew up in such an environment that it inculcated in him the idea to establish a feeling of brotherhood and unity among the Hindus and Muslims. This gesture of Kabirdas came a long way in the growth and development of the society then. It is said that he was born to a Brahmin widow who threw the new born baby into the river 'Lahartara' just after his birth. Afterwards he was found by a Muslim couple - Niru and Nima. Nima was a Muslim weaver who had no child, so the couple brought up the infant Kabirdas under their care. The love and care of his foster parents inculcated such qualities in him that inspired Kabirdas to establish a strong bond of brotherhood and co-operation among the Hindus and Muslims⁵. In spite of his upbringing in a Muslim weaver's family, Kabirdas was at heart a true devotee of Lord Rama. His foster father always encouraged him in his spiritual venture. In other words to say his foster father was the first teacher to initiate spiritual life. So Kabirdas had great respect for him.

As far as his caste and profession is concerned it came to be known from Kabirdas' own words that he was a poor Julaha - a Muhammedan weaver of Kasi. In his 'Doha' Kabirdas described himself as a 'Julaha' or 'Kouri'. The following are some 'Doha' (couplet) in which Kabirdas described himself as a 'Julaha'

—
"Tu Brahman, Mei Kasi Ka Julah

Hari Ke Nao Bin Kin Gati Paiye, Kahe Julaha Kabir"⁶

(Meaning - You are a Brahmin and I am a Julaha from Kashi, Julaha Kabir says that there is no way without blessings of God)

Kabirdas' social background as a low caste weaver makes it likely that he was more or less uneducated, or at least that he had no formal education in reading and writing. But it would be unjust to say that he was illiterate because he got to learn a lot from a variety of things and incidents in his life. In a 'Doha' (couplet) found in the Bijak, Kabirdas said that he never touched ink or paper -

"Moshi - Kaged suth nahi, kalam dhari nahi hath"⁷

(Meaning: I never touched ink or paper nor did I take a pen in my hand.)

Kabirdas appears to modern India to be the true devotee of non-conformity; of all that is free, noble and challenging in the Indian tradition. The doctrines of Bhakti were preached by Ramananda but it was popularized by Kabirdas and his followers. Kabirdas was a Vaishnavite. He was deeply influenced by Nirguna Bhakti and he held high faith and respect for the truth beyond worldly affair. He described his God as Nirguna. He tried to establish the superiority of Bhakti as the path to achieve Supreme Being. According to him, the easiest way to get closely associated with God is Bhakti. It is the highest sentiment of respect and love. Kabirdas' God is absolutely impersonal. No word can define Him. Kabirdas has to leave the concept of God as it might stand by itself unexplained. He does not believe in the incarnation of God and a personal God. The God, who is formless, has been adored by Kabirdas. Yet, he states that Bhakti or devotion is the main way for realization of God⁸. His treatment of Bhakti stands for harmony and peaceful co-existence of the different believes. Actually, in simple words, Kabirdas wanted to reform the society through the religion of Bhakti which may be acceptable for all people of different faiths and in this regards Kabirdas' concept of Bhakti is very significant and relevant in our present day society.

II. Objective Of The Paper:

In this paper an attempt has been made to present the concept of Bhakti in an Indian perspective mainly North India. Kabirdas, who was a bold and uncompromising reformer in the religious history of mediaeval India, was always against cast distinction. He tried in his whole life to reconcile the religious differences among different communities which raised its ugly head out of superstition and religious dogmatism. Kabirdas gave importance to Bhakti because he knew that without Bhakti, Jñāna and Karma become meaningless. For Kabirdas, Bhakti or devotion alone can lead one to realize oneself from bondage. They remind mankind that human life is transient and illusory, but mankind can make it real by devotion to Hari, for there is nothing real on earth other than devotion. With the help of devotion one can annihilate selfishness and thereby realize *Moksha*. The obligatoriness of devotion is therefore an unfailing authority in favor of purpose. It is indeed an unfailing mean to help man to attain real success in living a religious life. The concept of Bhakti is discussed by many philosophers of Eastern and Western philosophy. In order to make a certain limited area of research, it is decided to study the concept of Bhakti in Eastern or Indian perspective rather than Western perspective. The work of study includes Bhakti, its subject, its relation to mental or psyche and its existence with human life etc. All these are studied in the Indian perspective and special reference is given to Kabirdas. Although various discussions have been made on the concept of Bhakti in the Indian philosophy, it still needs more detailed

interpretations because philosophy has never been stable and as time passes philosophical problems arise with new directions of study.

III. Methodology

analytical and descriptive method is mainly used.

IV. Discussion

The period in which Kabirdas was born came to be known as the beginning of 'Bhakti Movement' in India. Kabirdas advocated for a common religion. His common religion is that where all classes of people irrespective of caste, creed, colour can worship the Supreme Lord and get mental peace. The basic teaching of each religion is to get united with the Supreme Soul by means of serving one's fellowmen. Only a person who is true, selfless, tolerant and sympathetic at heart can think of the welfare of other people and serve the needy in want. These are basic features of humanism. A true Bhakta sees his God in each and every particle of this universe. He feels the Adored God's presence everywhere. With the passage of time the power of Bhakti within the Bhakta enables him to see the world in the new light altogether. In this way he gets united with the Divine Soul. In this paper an effort has been made to describe Kabirdas as an ideal example of cultural harmony. He was an advocate of Bhakti dharma. He believed that arrogance and pride were hindrance in the path of getting united with the Divine Soul. Both the Haves and Haves Not (rich and poor) in society were inspired by his teachings. No doubt the conservative society of his time created hurdles for him. But the universal humanistic appeal in Kabirdas' teachings removed such hurdles and he bridged gaps between the Hindus and Muslims. His preachings and teachings brought an air of harmony in North India when communities experienced bitterness as far as social give and take was concerned.

Depending on the two types of Brahma – Saguna and Nirguna, Bhakti era has been divided into two parts in Hindi literature. These ways or 'marga's are Saguna Bhakti marga and Nirguna Bhakti marga. Kabirdas represented Gyanmargi section of the Nirguna Bhakti. He was attracted towards Vaishnavite religion at the time when he was a disciple of Guru Ramananda and got initiated into the marga of Vaishnava Bhakti. Kabirdas was such a devotee who thought of 'Rama' as his friend and spread the message of Bhakti and a secular religion in the society. In his own language he narrates—

“Mere Sangi Do Jana , Ek Vaishnav Ek Rama”⁹

(Meaning – I have two companions, one is Vaishnava and other is Rama.)

The effect of monism of Islam religion and Advaitavada of Indian philosophy can be observed in Kabirdas' concept of Bhakti. People know a little about the degrading situation of socio-economic and political sphere during the time of Kabirdas in mediaeval India. The political scenario of North India in mediaeval period was such that the ruler of Delhi (the Delhi Sultanate) was an impressive factor at that time as far as the time of Kabirdas is concerned. Sikandar Lodi was on the throne of Delhi then. This Muslim ruler was intolerant towards his Hindu subjects as far as religious tolerance is concerned. The Hindu religion too, faced some dilemmas then. In view of such chaotic state of that time Kabirdas wanted to propagate the Bhakti dharma with a view to create a sound and peaceful environment in the society through religious, social and political development. He felt that Bhakti marga is the only way for an ideal and peaceful society. Therefore, he blended the idea of Islam's monism and Hindu's Advaitavada and created a mixed Bhakti Dharma through which the differences between Muslims and Hindus could be removed and equality between the two religions established.

Kabirdas never tried to establish his identity as follower of a certain religion, sect or country, nor did he subscribe to any school of political or ideological thought. He considered himself to be a part of both Hindu and Muslim. He did not make any distinction between Hindu and Muslim community. He only tried to establish unity among the various people of the various religions through Bhakti. According to him truth reigns supreme in living beings as they emanate from the self-same source of life and light. According to Kabirdas —

“Ram Rahim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui
Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi
Krishna Karim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui
Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi II”¹⁰

(Meaning : Though there are two names, Ram and Rahim are the same. Kabirdas says that one should not be a mistake that Ram and Rahim are separate entities. In fact both Krishna and Karim are one; its only that there are two names. So, one should not make a mistake after knowing this.)

4.1 The place of Rama in Kabirdas' Bhakti

According to Kabirdas, Bhakti is the most powerful way in the realization of God. It is the only way for attaining God. Similarly it is the easiest way (path) for adoring God, God who is impersonal, who is Nirakara. He believed in a non-qualified Absolute Self. For him God has no body, no mind and no egoism. Kabirdas believed that God's grace can be achieved only through the way of Bhakti which is possible by means

of praise and prayers. Kabirdas' God is basically known as 'Rama'. Rama is the most favorite name which he got from his Guru Ramananda in his initiation into the fold of Bhakti. He has used this name 218 times in his poems collected in the Sant Kabir which is based on Guru Grantha Saheb.¹¹

"Kabir Ram Rijai Lai, Mukhi Aamrit Gun Gai
Phuta Naag Jo Jori Maan, Sandhi Sandhi Milai."¹²

(Meaning: The ever felt presence of God Rama within the heart affects the speech and pours nectar into the ears of the listener; its impact is such that even the hard- hitting harsh words become neutralized and thus helps bridging gaps between hearts.)

G. H. Westcott in his book entitled 'Kabir and the Kabir Panth' says: "His favorite name for God is Rama. Like all his Vaishnavite predecessors he seeks release from transmigration and opens the path to deliverance by loving devotion. The ancient mythology provides him with frequent illustrations, the great God of the venerable Triad, Brahma, Viṣṇu, Shiva still perform their functions in the economy of existence. And Kabir has not studied philosophy for nothing; its language is often on his lips."¹³

"Kabir aapon Ram kahi, aur Ram kohai
Jihi mukhi Ram na ucchare, tihi mukh pheri kohai."¹⁴

(Meaning : Bring the name of Rama to your lips and motivate others to do the same; one should not even pass a glance at that face, whose lips do not pronounce the name of Lord Rama.)

According to Kabirdas, though God has different names like Rama, Rahim, Allah, Hari, Govinda, yet Kabir believed that there was only one Supreme Being. And the Supreme Being or God has no body, no mind and no egoism. He (God) is without shape or form. He is the supreme object of love. He (God) creates by His own essential attributes. But these attributes are not different from God Himself. He (God) can be said to be bliss and blissful. For Kabirdas God and soul are identical. There is no distinction between the Absolute and the devotee or Bhakta. A Bhakta did not require a temple or mosque to reach the Supreme Being. There was no necessity of idols, incarnation (avatars) etc., the feeling of love and true devotion of devotee towards God is enough to reach Him. God is eternal. He has neither prior nor posterior. Kabirdas believed that it is through Bhakti that union or attachment with God could be achieved.

Many a time in his dohas (Couplets) Kabirdas used the word Rama instead of God. His 'Rama' is not the son of Dasharatha in Ramayana alone but God himself. Kabirdas used Rama for Supreme Being, for God and for Ultimate Lord. He has described his Rama as Nirguna. On one hand Kabirdas described his Rama as Nirguna or an abode of all qualities and on the other hand he described his Rama as Nirguna in the sense that He is free from all qualities, the qualities of Prakriti which go by the name of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

He says:

"Sant Dhokha Kasu Kahiye
Gun Mein Nirgun, Nirgun Mein Gun, Bati Sadi Kyun Rahiye
Ajar Amar Kahe Sab Koi, Alakh Naa Kathana Jai
Nati – Swarup – Baran Nahi Jhake Ghati-Ghati Rohyoi Samai
Pyand – Brahmant Kathe Sab Koi Bake Aadi Aro Anta Na Koi
Pyand – Brahmant Sari Je Kahiye Kahe Kabir Hari Soye"¹⁵

(Meaning: The Nirguna God with Guna in abundance is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is above Sakara Rupa or qualified form. One from the transitory world cannot gauge the capability of the Divine or Nirguna God).

Thus for Kabirdas God is not bound by the attribute of Prakriti and is yet the creator of the universe. The qualities which are centered in God form His essential nature. His qualities of omniscience and being all powerful help in the formation of the positive side of His Self and are not tainted by the qualities of Prakriti. In this way when Kabirdas describes the qualities of his God, he defines Him as Nirguna.

Nevertheless a question arises here. Is the Rama of Kabirdas equal to the God of Vedanta? It is difficult to give a proper reply to this question because the God of Vedanta is beyond ignorance and He is the Truth. Kabirdas' Rama is not beyond ignorance, but still people can worship Him. Though Kabirdas' God is structureless, formless and eternal, devotees can unite with Him. In spite of his Being structureless and beyond reach, devotees can form a relationship with Him; He is Omnipresent in all kind of action through various forms in everybody's soul. He is naturally present inside every human being.

Though Kabirdas' Rama is 'Nirguna', those devotees who do not believe in Kabirdas' idealism say that they cannot worship God without a shape. This means the formless God. That's why one should worship only the 'Saguna Brahma'. Kabirdas has repeatedly used the names of Rama, Govinda, Hari etc. in relation to the meaning of God, but not in relation to the incarnations as depicted in the epics. Kabirdas' Rama is not present in particular body, but is Omnipresent. His Rama is boundless, touching the eternal. According to Kabirdas Rama and soul are the same.¹⁶ Many scholars have accepted the love and admiration as the base of devotion. But apart from this love and admiration, Kabirdas accepted the essentiality of knowledge for devotion. He also gave importance to Viraha (Agony of separation from God's love) along with love in the field of

devotion. About Viraha, he has said that it is refiner of soul and the element to keep oneself self-delighting to God. Parallely he has said that the Prapattibhava and Saranagati are the important elements for Bhakti. Thus his opinion is love, knowledge, Viraha, Saranagati, sense of self dedication or Atmanivedana are all essential as far as Bhakti or devotion is concerned. Therefore it can be said in the words of Kabirdas that love, viraha, admiration etc. are all elements of Bhakti.

Kabirdas said that 'bhava' (inner sense) is essential for Bhakti. He felt that it is essential to worship God with a sense of devotion to emancipate from the distress of life. Otherwise emancipation is never possible for human soul. In his doha Kabirdas says—

“Bhab Bhagati Sau Hari Na Aaradha
Janam Maran Ki Mihi Na Sadha
Bhab Bhagati Biswas Binu Kate Na Sansei Mul
Kahe Kabir Hari Bhakti Binu Mukati Nahi Re Mul”¹⁷

(Meaning: There is no end to the trials and trauma of Re-circle if one doesn't surrender himself in totality before Hari. It is faith and true devotion of the heart through which one can attain the goodwill of Hari and attain Mukti or salvation.)

4.2 Elements of Bhakti

Whatever concept has been stated in Bhaktisutra of Narada, all such concepts were propagated by Kabirdas by his own sayings. Love and devotion is defined as 'Aasakti' in Narada Bhaktisutra and such love and devotion or in one sense 'love-devotion' has eleven modes of 'Aasakti'(s) or Bhakti like Gunamahatma Aasakti, Puja Aasakti, Smaran Aasakti, etc.. Kabirdas also implied all these 'Aasakti'(s) in his dohas. In his dohas he narrates about love of God, love for His worship, love to His worth hearing (katha sravana), self surrendering to Him (Aatmanivedana) and Viraha. Although a follower of Nirguna sect, Kabirdas too, has given a beautiful description of Rama's idol in his verses. Keeping this in view, it is needless to recount that he had used Rupa Aasakti of Narada Bhaktisutra in his sayings. Being himself a Nirguna worshiper, Kabirdas describes the uses of Rupa Aasakti as –

“Bhab Bhab Me Siddhi Hai, Bhab Bhab Me Bheb
Jo Mano To Dev Hai, Nahi To Vit Ka Leb.”¹⁸

(Meaning : It is the Bhab i.e. true devotional feelings of the heart that can help one attain Siddhi or accomplishment; it is upto the person concerned to decide which Bhab to accept and which to reject.)

Kabirdas attained delight in remembering the name of Rama (Nama Smarana) and singing praises (Gunanu Kirtan) of Him. Kabirdas did not like persons who did not remember and recite the name of Rama, Kabirdas disliked such a person and advised those people singing praises of Rama to keep themselves away from such persons company. In a couplet Kabirdas said -

“Jo Jan Kahi Ram Ka Nao I
Tinke Sada Bolihare Jao II
So Nirmal Nirmal Harigun Gawe I
Soi Bhai Mere Mani Bhawe II
Jihi Ghati Ram Rahiaa Bhar Puri I
Tin Ke Pog- Pankaj Hum Dhuri II”¹⁹

(Meaning: The person on whose lips the name of Rama is ever-present, he who is always full of gratitude towards Rama, who always sings the glory of Rama, it is such a devotee in whose heart Rama resides. Such a blessed devotee thinks of himself as a particle of dust at the feet of Rama.)

Kabirdas propagated the nobility of Rama doing Kirtana around. Even though he was a worshiper of Nirguna Nirakara, the effect of Aatmanivedana, Bandana, Archana etc. are noticed clearly in Kabirdas' compositions. According to Kabirdas, Atmanivedana or self dedication is the highest devotion of all. Examples of this Atmanivedana Bhakti are clearly seen in his compositions. Thus, on an analytical base of his compositions it is clear that he himself merged in the Bhakti of Rama and devoted his everything to Lord Rama and became delighted on seeing his beloved man in Rama. He devoted his body and soul to the Lord for which he never felt pain or sorrow. If he sustained injury in his body his mind and body was not within him to feel the pain or sorrow. Therefore he said—

“Mere Muj Mai Kuch Nahi
Jo Kuch Hai So Tera
Tera Tuj Ko Soupte
Keya Lage Hai Mera II”²⁰

(Meaning: There is nothing which I can say Mine, everything is Yours. How can I but not surrender everything to You, for You are the owner of all.)

As it can be seen in Kabirdas' compositions that the effect of Atmanivedana or self dedication, Bandana or adoration, Archana or obeisance, Prema or love and Viraha or Sorrow is ever present, the same effect of different parts of Prapatti or Saranagati can also be seen as well. In fact the vital element of devotion and Prapatti is the same, which is also described as Bhagavad Prema. It can be assumed that due to this reason the analysis of Bhakti by different scholars in their own way emphasizing on love can be seen. But Kabirdas propagated his verses of devotion giving importance to both love and Viraha. According to him the main component of Saranagati is to do well of his Adorable. On the contrary, he says that to do an adverse task for the adorable, is a second component of Saranagati.

Similarly by doing propagation of God's sayings through love and devotion, Kabirdas became the Dasha (Servant in a sense of true devotee of the adorable) of Lord Rama. Therefore, he says as –

“Sahaje Sahaje Sab Gaye Sut Bit Kamini Kaam
Ek Mek Hai Mili Raha Dash Kabira Rama”²¹.

(Meaning : Nothing except You, Rama, is in my heart, with You in my heart I can easily get my heart rid of all lust and desire that binds me to the materialistic world.)

Whatever the analysis and the interpretation made on Kabirdas' sayings on the basis of Bhakti, it is seen that Saguna Upashak (Person who worship God posses of attributes) also worship their adorable on the basis of the same Bhakti. It is worth considering that Kabirdas, although, was a devotee of Nirguna Brahma and Jñana Mārga (way of knowledge) sect, many of his sayings represents Saguna Bhakti also. The clear description of Viraha Aasakti, Tanmai Aasakti and Smarana Aasakti in his verses or dohas can be seen. All these Aasakti(s) are the components of Saguna Bhakti. He desires to see the form of God as being a worshiper of Nirguna Bhakti. In his poetic composition he narrates—

“Aakhiya Jaai Pari Panth Nihari Nihari
Jivariya Sale Padre Ram Pukari Pukari II”²²

(Meaning: With longing eyes I look towards You, O Rama! In spite of unfavourable situations and hurdles it is You that I pine for.)

Being the worshiper of Nirguna Bhakti, Kabirdas become restless in search of Rama for his company.

“Nayana Nijara Laiya
Rahat Wahe Nish Yama.
Papiha Jo Piu Piu Karo
Kab Re Mil Hu Ge Rama.”²³

(Meaning: Just as the Chatak Pakshi or Chatak bird who pines and waits for a droplet of rain to quench its thirst, I too wait patiently to get the glimpse of You, O my Lord Rama!!)

Having observed this it can be realized that there is the presence of a Saguna quality in Kabirdas' Bhakti. The ultimate goal of Saguna Bhakti is to emancipate only where the existence and image of God and worshiper are being separated. On the other hand, the main objective of Nirguna Bhakti is 'Nirvana' which means achievement of the salvation from the illusion or bondage of birth and death and merges into the eternal Brahma. Whatsoever the devotion of Brahma practised by Kabirdas, the Brahma is the symbol of ultimate existence. This existence is omnipresence. On one hand He is the Creator and on the other hand the Destroyer.

According to Kabirdas, his Rama exists everywhere. Here, it can be pointed out that if his Rama exists everywhere and creator of the universe, He has His existence in true sense also. If He has the existence, then how did Kabirdas' Rama become Nirguna? Is it possible to disclose an existence without the form of Saguna? In addition to the above argument, Kabirdas has said that Jñana, Yoga etc. are the component part of Bhakti and also suggest to do Smarana, Kirtana etc. with the name of Rama. But this consideration is not possible to do without His form. There should be a notion of form or Aakara to memorise something. Where the notion comes –it is called Saguna or Sakara. Further Kabirdas says to acquire God by doing hathayoga (one kind of meditation which purify the physical human body). Here the analysis comes to this point that if the God is Nirguna, can He be acquired by devotees? Most of the sayings of Kabirdas imply Saguna Bhakti only. Perhaps, his Nirguna Rama implied in Saguna Rama, because the essence of both is the same and that is nothing but Bhakti. Therefore, one can experience the existence of God through the path of Bhakti only, no matter whether He is in the form of Saguna or Nirguna.

4.3 Eight features of Bhakti

According to Kabirdas Bhakti is an unqualified attachment and surrender of the human soul to the Supreme Soul. In Kabirdas' concept of Bhakti the eight features of Bhakti can be seen. These eight features are –

- a) Parammātmābodha
- b) Mādhurjyabhāba

- c) Nāmasmarana
- d) Guru – mahattva
- e) Madhyamamārga
- f) Prapattibhāba
- g) Hathayoga
- h) Suddha-Āsarana²⁴

a) Parammātmābodha

The most important feature of Kabirdas' Bhakti is Parammātmābodha. The term Parammātmābodha is the combination of three words Param + ātmman + bodha. Here the term Param indicates Ísvara or Brahmana, ātmman means soul and bodha means to realise or to understand. Therefore the meaning of the word Parammātmābodha is to realise the Supreme Being or God or Parambrahma. Kabirdas identified his Paramātmman as Rama. The primary basis of Kabirdas' Bhakti was to establish union with the Supreme Soul. He believed in a nonqualified Absolute Self. He prescribes Bhakti as a most potent factor in the realization of His grace. Bhakti is generally directed towards a personal God or His incarnation; but according to Kabirdas it is best to accept Bhakti as the easiest path for adoring his impersonal God.²⁵

The Nath panthi (the followers of Nath sect) believed in the essence of Oneness and this Oneness is beyond the Dvaita-Advaita, Nirguna and Saguna. The Nath panthi calls this essence as Nath, and this Nath is similar to God, God who is Nirguna Siva, pure Chaitana and Saguna Siva as a Chaitana who is full of quality or form. Kabirdas believed that his Rama is beyond all quality, all forms, He is present as it is.²⁶ In his doha Kabirdas spoke of the uniqueness of God repeatedly. He said that all living beings are a part of Hari. Similarly Hari is present in all living beings. So, for him the existence of God is there in all living beings. Human beings are only the form of Rama, but the existence of Rama is already there in each and every person. In his doha he said-

“Jab Mai Tha Tab Hari Nahi, Aab Hari Hai Mai Nahi
Sab Andhiara Miti Gaya, Jab Dipak Dekha Mahi.”²⁷

(Meaning : When Kabirdas was present he failed to perceive the existence of God. Now that he feels the presence of God, he himself has ceased to exist. The darkness of ignorance has now been dispelled by the beacon of knowledge.)

Similarly, Kabirdas also said

“Jab Mai Tha Tab Hari Nahi Ab Hari Hai Mai Nahi
Kabira Nagari Ek Mai , Raja Do Na Samahi”²⁸

(Meaning: When Kabir was present he failed to perceive the existence of God. Now that he feels the presence of God, he himself has ceased to exist. Because Kabir thinks that two kings doesn't accommodate in a single town.)

The main base of Kabirdas' Bhakti is the union with the Param Brahma. Kabirdas synthesized the concept of both Hinduism and Islamism and proposed a way for praying to God, who is the controller of everything, who is without any specific shape, exists everywhere, the Supreme Brahman and the Supreme Lord. God exists among all of us but He is invisible. God of Kabirdas can be expressed neither in any language nor in any word.

(b) Mādhurjyabhāba

One of the basic characteristics of Kabirdas' Bhakti is Mādhurjya Bhakti. Mādhurjya Bhakti was influenced by Mādhurjyabhāba. Mādhurjyabhāba means the feeling of love. In Mādhurjya Bhakti Kabirdas stated that his Nirguna God is like a woman, the symbol of love. Kabirdas' concept of Mādhurjyabhāba is partially influenced by Suficism, Kabir says in his doha –

“Basuri Sukh Na Reni Sukh
Na Sukh Su Pi Ne Mahi
Kabir Bisuriya Ram So
Na Sukh Dhup Na Chao.”²⁹

(Meaning: Kabir says that there is no ease for one in the day time nor at night, in dream that person is not at ease; he who has been forsaken by Rama, has ease neither in shade nor out in the sun.)

Again,

“Birahani Abhi Panth Siri
Panthi Buje Dhai
Ek Sabda Kahi Piu Ka
Kab Re Milenge Aai.”³⁰

(Meaning: The damsel waits eagerly at the edge of the road and approaches each and every passerby crossing her, enquiring eagerly about her beloved to know when he would come to meet her.)

Like this Kabirdas also said—

“Jaha Prem Taha Nem Nahi, Taha Na Buddhi Byabahar
Prem Magan Bhaiyaa , Kaun Gine Tithi Baar.”³¹

(Meaning : Love follow no rules, it is purely a matter of the heart where rational thinking stops and nothing except the heart does the speaking. The intensity of the feeling is such that.)

c) Nāma—Smarana

The importance of nāma-smarana that means repetition of the name of Rama or meditating or the remembering of the name of Rama can be seen in a vast way in Kabirdas’ Bhakti. Both types of devotee Saguna and Nirguna tell man about the glory of nāma-smarana. To them nāma-smarana is the Brahmana and therefore they give extreme importance to that. So the repetition of the name of Rama is the most important aspect of Kabirdas’ Bhakti. The meditation on the name of God is the most important aspect of Bhakti. Kabirdas says, “O blessed man, go to the protection of the One only. O living being, recite the Name only and you should be sure of your deliverance.”³²

According to Kabirdas, the recitation of the name of Rama came to form the chief mode of meditation. Kabirdas himself says, “I was inclined neither towards Yoga nor towards Dhyān. (I am certain that) Without Vairagya (renunciation) Maya cannot be discarded. How can my life exist unless I take the name of Rama as my prop? Says Kabirdas -“I have searched the whole firmament but I have not seen the equal of Rama.”³³ For Kabirdas without remembering the name of Rama and repetition of His name, human life becomes full of pain. Nāma-smarana is the only way to remove the pain of human beings. But human mind is dynamic, when the mind is full of pleasure man forget the repetition and remembrance of the name of God or Rama. Kabirdas says that it is man’s duty to recite the name of Rama every day. In his own language, Kabirdas says –

“Dukh Mein Sumiran Sab Kare
Sukh Mein Kare Na Koi
Jo Sukh Mein Sumiran Kare
To Dukh Kahe Ko Hoye.”³⁴

(Meaning : All remember God during their bad days; but forget to take the name of God during their days of happiness. How can he be unhappy who remembers the name of Hari?)

The tradition of Nāma-smarana was first introduced by the singers of Alvara in South India. In the South, Alvara singers had this in the form of songs and when the Bhakti movement travelled northward with the philosophic concept of Ramanuja, the Maharashtra saints Jnyandeva and Namadeva took this remembering the name of Panduranga or Vitthala as a form of Kirtana and Smarana and the Mahanubhava sect considered the name of Krishna Chakradhar as the favorite name for recitation. But in North India the great Vaishnava Acharya, who was known as Ramananda, the guru of Kabirdas, gave preference to the name of Rama and Kabirdas himself selected this name out of many which he used for his God.³⁵

d) Guru--Mahattva

Guru-Mahattva is one of the characteristics of Kabirdas’ Bhakti. For Bhakti, Kabirdas has recommended the importance of Guru. He has compared Guru or the teacher to God. Kabirdas cannot think of initiation into Bhakti without the help of Guru. For Kabirdas, Guru is the guide and he alone can lead the disciple to the threshold of devotion through the intricate mazes of Maya.³⁶ In his doha Kabirdas says that –

“Kabir Sat Guru Na Miliya
Rahi Adhuri Sikh
Swag Jati Ka Pahari Kar
Ghari Ghari Mange Bhikh.”³⁷

(Meaning: In Kabir’s words, one who is unable to find a true Guru, his knowledge and realization is incomplete.

In view of this incompleteness, the disciple seeks for that rare and true knowledge here and there for his incompetence in seeking out a genuine spiritual guide like Guru.)

Sometimes Kabirdas considered Guru to be superior to Govind or the Lord. He feels that Guru’s grace is supreme and God is the giver of salvation but Guru gives Govind himself. Guru lifts the disciples from the bondage of Maya and transports the disciples to the highest of divine ecstasy. Kabirdas also said that Guru is the greatest shelter for devotees. In his doha he says-

“Guru Govind Dono Khare
Kiske Lagu Pawye
Balihari Guru Apne
Govind Diya Batayen.”³⁸

(Meaning: There is no difference between Guru and Govind. In the true sense Guru and Govind are one and inseparable, only the form is dual. Pointing out to this all important aspect Kabirdas says that one need to respect Guru first as it is through the guidance of a Guru that a disciple can attain his goal of getting close to God.)

In his another doha, Kabir says-

“Kabir Hari Ke Ruthte
Guru Ke Saran a Jaye
Kahe Kabir Guru Ruthte
Hari Nahi Hote Sahay.”³⁹

(Meaning: Kabir says that when God is in a sulking mood then one need to go to the Guru for assistance. But when the Guru is sulking then even God cannot help him.)

Kabirdas always sung the glory of the Guru in his songs. Other two examples of Guru-Mahattva which was sung by Kabirdas are—

“I could only know His mysteries when Gurudeva met me with kind disposition”⁴⁰

“The light of divine knowledge got spread and its realization was transmitted to me through the grace of the great Guru. Kabir is intoxicated with that wine in such a way that it shall never be stale. Thus the Guru is extolled to Supreme heights and without him it is not possible to make any progress in the realms of devotion.”⁴¹

e) Madhyamamārga

According to Kabirdas man should be completely involved neither as a householder nor as a renunciator. One should reject the extra things from both and should follow middle policy to be galvanized in Bhakti. He did not want that one should go to the forest forsaking the love and affection of his family for devotion of God. He, of course, was a follower of the ‘moderate course’ like Lord Buddha. According to him, a person who adopts a full fledged saint life or householder life cannot concentrate on true devotion towards God. Further he opined that excessiveness of saintliness or inclination towards household affairs is not good. The symptom of a real devotee is to place both duties in their proper place and to perform them in life. A person, who complied with the household duties, keeps his greed, illusion, desires and anger under control in a disciplined manner, can be the true devotee. Such a person who is a householder, becomes a true devotee who is able to comply with devotion. They need not go to a jungle for devotion. Kabirdas himself was a devotee of such nature. It may be estimated from his sayings that he was a real devotee of Rama. Merging his entire life between propagation of Bhakti dharma and Rama Nāma-smarana, Kabirdas also performed his duties as a householder parallelly. He disclosed in his dohas that he had a wife named Loi and two children Kamal and Kamali⁴². According to him a person who controls his mind, can live a full renunciated life even if he maintains his duties as a householder. Therefore, he advised people to follow a Madhyamamārga living a domestic life merging self in devotion towards God.

f) Prapattibhāba

In Kabirdas’s concept of Bhakti Prapattibhāba has great importance. The meaning of Prapattibhāba is ‘Ananya Bhakti’. In Bayupurana Prapatti is understood as –

- I. Positive attributes of God
- II. Faith in God as the Savior
- III. Recitation and remembering the name of God
- IV. Self-Surrender
- V. Rejecting the negative attributes of God
- VI. Ability to become compassionate to others.⁴³

It is seen that there are six manners of Charanagati in Kabirdas’ concept of Bhakti as because one can find the description of Nirguna, Nirakaara Brahma’s attributes in all his compositions. He has also said about relinquishing the sense of greed, illusion, hopes and desires and also advised to give up the negative attitude towards God. Further he says –

“Kabir Tu Ka He Dare, Sir Pari Hari Ka Hath
Hasti Chari Nahi Doliye, Kukar, Muse Ju Lakh”⁴⁴

(Meaning : You don’t have to fear when the God’s blessings are upon you, as you are under His protection. All kind of worldly obstacles would be overcome by you through His blessings.)

Thus, by saying this Kabirdas confirms his belief that God is there to save His devotees. Once again Kabirdas describes Rama’s attribute as-

“Kabir Suta Kya Kare, Gun Govinda Ke Gait Ere Sir
Par Jam Khada, Kharas Kade Ka Khaai”⁴⁵

(Meaning: One who is inactive and indifferent towards pronouncing the name of Hari in his lips, such people have to confront barricades and obstacles in the journey of life.)

g) Hathayoga

In his analysis of Bhakti, Kabirdas had mentioned 'Ira', 'Pingala', 'Kundalini' etc. in several places and by this he wanted to harmonize hathayoga and prema-bhakti. Hathayoga is a kind of meditation through which one can purify the physical body. This is essential for reaching new heights as far as the meditation to be with the Supreme Being is concerned. In Kabirdas' Bhakti Mārga selfless and complete surrender of the self is necessary to be with God or Rama. A Bhakta can attain this by practicing Hathayoga. Hathayoga helps in controlling the bad minds that opens a long way in relieving a Bhakta of worldly ties and help him become close with Rama.

h) Suddha-Āchraṇa

Kabirdas has emphasized on purity and honesty. According to him, it is through purity and honesty that one can attain the Supreme Being, but Maya is the greatest obstacle in the way of purity and honesty. Kabirdas has personified Maya in wealth and woman (Kanchan and Kamini) as these take away man from the righteous path and entangle him in worldly muddle. He distinguished honesty as the main weapon of Bhakti.

The important quality in Kabirdas' Bhakti is to emphasize on moral conduct which is a main part of Bhakti. He has even said that the conduct of a devotee should be pure to get this specialty. In order to attain purity of behavior a person devoted to spiritual achievement makes himself fit to abandon two elements i.e. 'Kanak' and 'Kamini' who originates from illusion. Kabirdas has said that both 'Kanak' and 'Kamini' are the main enemies of human race which cause hindrance in the path of devotion. 'Kamini' destroys happiness and pleasure in man's life for which man cannot enter into the path of Bhakti, Mukti and Gyana. He says-

“Nari Nasawe Tin Such
Ja Nar Pase Howe
Bhagati Mukuti Nij Gyan Me
Payshi Na Sakoi Koye.”⁴⁶

(Meaning : Beware of woman who often misleads man from the three paths/facts; Bhakti, Mukti and Jñan are these three facts that man can acquire if remained aloft from the company of woman.)

Not only this, at times he has said, 'Kamini kali Nagini' i.e. a woman can be compared to a poisonous snake. He has also condemned both Kanak and Kamini as poisonous fruit and fire net.

“Maya Ki Jal Jag Jalaya Kanak Kamini Lagi
Kahu Dho Kihi Bidhi Rakhiye Rui Lapeti Aagi.”⁴⁷

(Meaning: Gold and woman can be compared to the maze daze of Maya. Kabir says that woman is that element of Maya which need to be avoided so that one doesn't fall a slave to Maya or worldly desires.)

Kabirdas advised people to keep themselves safe and secure from desire, anger, greed, and illusion of Kanak and Kamini. According to him, Kanak and Kamini means bad company. A person can attain purity in behavior only if he abandons Kanak and Kamini and the bad company. He viewed that people can earn purity in behaviour if he keeps himself with the company of wise man or saint and through these people, can awaken Bhakti in his heart. He has said that whatever man selects for a company, he may become like that company. In Kabirdas' doha he says-

“Kabira Sangati Sadhu Ki, Hare Or Ki Byadhi
Sangati Buri Kusadhu Ki, Aatho Prahar Upadhi
Kabir Man Panchi Bhaya, Jaha Man Taha Uri Jaye
Jo Jeisi Sangati Kare, So Tese Fal Khaye.”⁴⁸

(Meaning: Good person's or Sadhu's company will give you mental peace and tranquility of the soul, staying in the company of fake Sadhu will bring restlessness to the mind; so, do select your company carefully for the outcome of your mental health depends on the company you keep.

Thus it can be seen that Kabirdas' concept of Bhakti is an outcome of Kabirdas' own realization of God and reconciliation of the apparent conflicting ideas prevailing in different faiths of his time. His treatment of Bhakti stands for harmony and peaceful co-existence of different faiths. It is seen that Kabirdas has given more emphasize to develop prosperity and purity in man's behaviour and people's insistence towards truth in his Bhakti. He rejected idol worship and incarnation and advocated for Nama Smarana to achieve eternal spirit.

V. Conclusion

From the above discussion one can get the idea that the seed of integration is inherent in the character of God and Bhakti is the only way of attachment with God. Bhakti is found in a universal fellowship where the basic principle is sharing and having mutual understanding with God. Bhakti is nothing but an investigation of truths - Param Brahma or the Absolute Truth, Absolute knowledge or conduct and it is related to Religion. By practicing Bhakti people get a balanced view of life, the dignity of life and thereby creating a new social order. Bhakti is the only thing that binds the people of human society crossing barriers such as language, caste of birth,

religious beliefs and racial diversity. It is a powerful factor in human life. Bhakti rightly values human's traditions and culture because the teaching of Bhakti contributes a great deal to man's fundamental cultural unity and appreciates our spiritual and moral values in life.

The great movement of reformers brought about a new and comprehensive outlook towards life and distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour. The dignity of the individual man as a distinct religious being was declared. Kabirdas tried to establish a common religion where all class of people irrespective of caste, creed, colour can worship the Supreme Lord and get mental peace. This common religion is known as the Bhakti religion; mental peace is attained by the people through this religion. In fact Kabirdas introduced a casteless, cultural and peaceful society to people and wanted to show people the capacity which is hidden in them. He played a very important role to spread the main aim of Bhakti.

Kabirdas represented a link in the tradition of religion and culture. He emphasized that person who can understand the importance of Bhakti, can understand the value of cultural and social life. Kabirdas successfully spearheaded a vigorous spiritual and social Bhakti movement which improved the moral and spiritual life of our society. In the present time when in the society everywhere is full of violence, we recall and learn from the reformers or saints of Bhakti age not only the idea of harmony and love but also that of larger unity, because they gave a new discipline to the society, a faith in single divine who is Parama Brahma or Absolute Truth. The way of Bhakti which is propagated by the saints or reformers of that age is secular and symbol of peace and harmony.

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