

Kabir

January 29, 2019

Manifest Pedagogy

This Year commemorates 500 years of Kabir. The recent trend in UPSC is to emphasize more on the Bhakti and Sufi saints. Particularly questions are being asked on their periodization in prelims and their philosophies in mains. This topic on Kabir is highly relevant for UPSC this year.

In news

500 years of Kabir.

Placing it in syllabus

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Dimensions

Kabir as part of Bhakti and Sufi traditions

Central aspects of his philosophy

Kabir impact on Medieval times

Relevance to today's problems

Content

Kabir is a Mystic saint poet of India who had a great influence on his time and who holds great relevance to current times. Kabir's early life is not firmly established. In Indian tradition, he is commonly supposed to have lived for 120 years from 1398 to 1518, which "permits him to be associated with other famous figures such as Guru Nanak and Sikander Lodi".

His ideas/ and philosophy.

Kabir's poetry is a reflection of his philosophy about life. His writings were mainly based on the concept of reincarnation

and karma. Kabir's philosophy about life was very clear-cut. He believed in living life in a very simplistic manner. He had a strong faith in the concept of oneness of God. He advocated the notion of Koi bole Ram Ram Koi Khudai.... The basic idea was to spread the message that whether you chant the name of Hindu God or Muslim God, the fact is that there is only one God who is the creator of this beautiful world.

Talking about the philosophies & principles of Kabirdas, he was against the caste system imposed by the Hindu community and also opposed the idea of worshipping the idols. On the contrary, he advocated the Vedantic concepts of atman. He supported the idea of minimalist living that was advocated by the Sufis. To have a clear idea about the philosophy of sant Kabir, check out his poems and two line verses known as dohas that speak his mind and soul.

Kabir's Teachings:

Kabir's philosophical tenets were extremely simple. He was known as the guiding spirit of the Bhakti Movement. He preached Bhakti or 'Devotion' through the medium of his 'Dohas'. Kabir's Dohas touched everybody's heart and he was endeared by all. Following are the aspects on which kabir has expressed his ideas;

Love:

Love for all was Kabir's principal tenet. He emphasized that love was the only medium which could bind the entire human kind in an unbreakable bond of fraternity. Kabir detested the frivolities and rituals in Hinduism and Islam for, these could never bind together mankind. Hence he advised all to give up hatred and perpetuate love for one and all.

God:

God was the focal point of Kabir's religion and Kabir addressed him in different names. In his opinion God alone was

Ram, Rahim, Govind, Allah, Khuda, Hari etc. But for Kabir, 'Saheb' was his favorite name. He said god was everywhere and His domain is unlimited. God was pure, sacred, existing, without form, light, endless and inseparable. Hence God was all powerful and he could only be worshipped through love and devotion. In whatever name one addresses Him, God is one and has no second. Hence Kabir preached Monotheism.

Teacher:

In Kabir's dictum the Teacher or 'Guru' has been accorded the prime position. The teacher according to him was the incarnation of God. Kabirs had this realization only when he came in contact with Ramananda. It was the guidance of a teacher that led man in the proper direction and helped him in developing the right insight.

The Path of Bhakti:

Kabir stressed that the only way to attain God was through the path of Bhakti. Intense love and devotion would surely lead one to the ultimate attainment of Godhood. Total submission at His feet helps one to reach him and this should be the ultimate goal of all was what Kabir emphasized. For this no rituals or ceremonies were needed, only purity of heart and unflinching devotion were the two essentials. Hence Kabir advised his followers to attain Godhood through the path of Bhakti.

Soul:

Matters relating the soul were an integral part of Kabir's spiritual messages. Soul according to him was life, breath and knowledge. It was a part of the 'ultimate knowledge'. The soul itself was the creation and it also was the creator. It was also the knowledge and the knowledgeable. The soul was the creator of all things, it also was the destroyer. In Kabir's opinion cows may be of different colours but milk was the same.

Hence, though different ideas and thoughts may be merging together, soul remained the same. Soul was one, inseparable and self-creating. It was the greatest creation of God. Kabir propounded many different views on soul. Hence it became very difficult to have an exact definition of the soul.

Impermanence of the world:

Kabir asserted the impermanence of all things in the world. All living and non living things like insects, animals, trees, rivers, mountains and human beings are only temporary and all would cease to exist some day. He advised his followers not to lament the death of something which was bound to die. Hence he emphasized that in this impermanent world, the only truth and permanent reality was God, who could be attained through Bhakti.

Salvation:

Liberation or salvation was another contention of Kabir. Liberation implied freedom from the pangs of life and death. Liberation according to him was a state of "fearlessness". By citing an example he said just as water flows out of a hole in a pot and mixes with the water outside, similarly, after death the individual soul moves out of the gross body to merge with the cosmic soul. This is liberation.

Antagonist of caste system and evil practices:

Kabir was a great opponent of the caste system. He stressed that in God's creation all were equal. He advised his followers to give up such inhuman practices as untouchability, feelings of high and low etc. He further opposed the worship of stone images, or even the worship of different gods and goddesses and was against rituals and ceremonies in religion.

Nature of People:

Kabir's sermons were based on reality. He pointed out that

people prayed God only when they were in trouble but no one remembered Him in good times. But he who remembers Him in happiness and in good times never faces sorrow.

Nature of Saint:

A saint according to Kabir should give up all trivialities and preserve only the kernel of all knowledge. All knowledge and enlightenment were within one's own self and one had to seek them out. To attain purity of the self one need not go to the temple or mosque. All such philosophical tenets were explained by Kabir through his 'Dohas' or rhyming couplets. The following 'dohas' of Kabir contain some important aspects of his teaching:

"O seeker, where do you seek me, I am beside there, I am neither in temple nor in mosque, I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash, Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, ' Nor in yoga or renunciation. If thou art a true seeker. Thou shall at once see me. Thou shall see me in a moment of time. O Sadhu, God is beneath all breaths."

Kabir's ideals were enthusiastically accepted by the people, and Kabir's preaching's deeply influenced the religious reform movement in medieval India. The Bhakti movement found real expression through Kabir.

His influence on later Bhakti saints and society

The entry of Kabir into the Bhakti movement proved most fruitful in bringing about reconciliation between the Hindus and the muslims. With filial attachment to both the religious communities, Kabir was free from religious prejudices against either. He followed the path of mysticism, the bhakti and the sufi tradition. Though infamously religions in outlook, he was not a slave of either Hinduism or Islam.

He was a man of absolutely independent thoughts and broadly criticised the evils of both the religions. Kabir addressed mixed gatherings consisting of Muslim and Hindus and made

disciples from both. He denounced the Brahmins and the mullahas alike to be sole custodian of their religious orders and took them to task for their orthodox and exploitative attitude. He refused to accept the sanctity of Vedas as well as Quran to be the revealed scriptures.

Guru Nanak, a young contemporary of Kabir, who took up the cause of socio-religious reforms in the Punjab, proved to be the most celebrated of all the bhakti reformers of medieval India. His teachings were identical with those of Kabir. Kabir's verses were incorporated into Adi Granth, the scripture of Sikhism, with verses attributed to Kabir constituting the largest non-Sikh contribution.

Every individual is to live as honest bread earners and householders just as a lotus flowers survives with untainted character in the midst of muddy water.

Kabir's legacy continues to be carried forward by the Kabir panth ("Path of Kabir"), a religious community that recognises him as its founder and is one of the Sant Mat sects.

His relevance to contemporary times.

Kabir was strictly against the practice of hypocrisy and didn't like people maintaining double standards. He always preached people to be compassionate towards other living beings and practice true love. Which is somewhat missing in present days.

He urged the need to have company of good people that adhere to values and principles.

He emphasized that love was the only medium which could bind the entire human kind in an unbreakable bond of fraternity

He advised all to give up hatred and perpetuate love for one and all.

Today's world is bogged down by the excessive materialism of the world. The deep seated economic inequalities of the world are leading to a simmering discontent across the world. Kabir's principles of compassionate ethics are relevant

Corruption is the deep seated problem in India which is eating

away the vitals of the nation inside out the emphasis on honest livelihood by Kabir if understood in the right spirit will provide a way of changing the individual perspective. Communalism is a lurking evil in the Indian societal context the essential syncretism and universalism which are part of Kabir can help in solving this issue to a certain extent.