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Images of Kabir

As described by Yadav in Assi and Nagwa, and Julaha in Shivala and Saket Nagar

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Abstract

In his own time, the nirguna poet-saint Kabir was a controversial figure. He spoke ill of Islam and Hinduism alike, yet, in the end, both groups claimed him as their own. In this essay, various images of Kabir are discussed. Kabir as he appears in legends; Kabir as he appears in his poems; Kabir as a historical figure. But more importantly, Kabir as he is perceived as today. The image of Kabir, as it were. The question of ‘who Kabir was’ is posed to members of two groups in the city of Banaras, India — one group Muslim (Julah), the other Hindu (Yadav).
Notes on transliteration and terms

Words in Hindi and Sanskrit have been transliterated using standard methods of showing pronunciation as used in Benjamin Walker, Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism (Volume 1), first published in 1968 by Goerge Allen & Unwin Ltd, (New Delhi: Rupa & co, 2005) and others. That is, using diacritics. Instead of simply writing ‘diksha’, the spelling ‘dikshā’ is used, as this follows the actual pronunciation in the original language more closely. Spelling in book titles, quotes and such, are, naturally, given as they were spelled in the original.

The standard transliteration system for Sanskrit is used, except for a few modifications to aid in pronunciation. For Hindi, the mute ‘a’ at the end of a word is dropped — but only if the ‘a’ is, indeed, mute.

Terms that might be unknown for a reader unaccustomed to Hinduism, Indian culture — or other areas touched by in the paper — are explained in footnotes on introduction of term. See, for instance, note 6 on page 7 about ‘Banāras’.
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1 Introduction

In the late 13th century, a child was born — the views differ as to where and by whom he was born, but all agree that he was to become a weaver, and more than that, a poet that would have an impact on Indian literature — even the language of Hindi itself. Kabir would be seen as a Sant and a Pir, as a revolutionary and as an ‘apostle of Hindu and Muslim unity’. Kabir can be quoted by people of lower cast Hindu’s and Brahmins alike, by Muslims as well as Hindus — or even Christians.

Kabir spoke against both the religion of Hindus and of Muslims — yet, at the end, he was embraced by both groups. This was six-hundred years ago. Who is he today? Is he still embraced by both groups? If so, as what; how do they perceive him?

There has been much debate about who Kabir was. There are many views, but facts are scarce. Even though there’s no way of knowing with certainty who he really was — we can’t even tell for sure which poems can be ascribed to Kabir —, there are opinions of him. People have their own views of who he was. This — i.e. the views of him can be studied. The images of Kabir, as he is described by different groups, are interesting in their own right. How is Kabir, a possible focal point between Hindus and Muslims, actually described by Hindus and Muslims?

The question at hand, then, is What is the image of Kabir today, as described by Hindus and Muslims?

1.1 Framing the Question

The aim of this paper is not an all-encompassing survey, covering all views and uses of Kabir — though that would be interesting research to undertake. What is sought after here is rather a glimpse of how people view Kabir. Given that there are so many facets of the figure Kabir, many even contradictory, it is interesting to see how people view him. In order to be able to discern something tangible, the question of who Kabir was will be posed to two specific groups, one Hindu and one Muslim.

It is especially interesting to see how people from the two religions view Kabir, as he can, judging from legends, poems and history, be seen as either a follower of Islam, or the

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1 More on the dates of Kabir in section 2.3.2 on page 35.
2 Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity was the title of a book by Muhammad Hedayetullah. Unfortunately, at the time of writing it proved impossible to acquire it. Even though several sources mention Hedayetullah, virtually all agree that Kabir was, in fact, not an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. More on this in section 2.3.6 on page 42.
3 See section 2.3.1 on page 34 for biographical information.
4 Even if only focusing on the poems, the personality of Kabir, the image of Kabir, would be different depending on which collection of poems one would study. See in section 2.2.2 on page 31.
Hindu faith — or neither. Do Hindus see Kabir as a Hindu, and vice versa; does the one group see the influences of the other religion in the figure of Kabir?

Kabir is known throughout India, and especially in North-India. As his probable place of birth[5] Banaras[6] is a location where one would expect people to know, and have opinions of, Kabir. Thus, this is where the question will be asked of the two groups.

Kabir’s original audience was the lay people — or even more specifically, groups positioned low in the social hierarchy. In this paper it is that group that will be approached. A reason why this group would be more interesting is that one could surmise that the view of the highly educated — of scholars, as it were — would correspond fairly closely with the image of Kabir as put forward in various books on the subject[7] Thus, it is simply less interesting to study. It is less clear what view lay men would have of Kabir. And this is what the study will take as its subject.

Through the poems attributed to Kabir, both Hinduism and Islam are criticized, yet that criticism also brought people of the respective faiths together. Rituals and outer practices mean nothing, Kabir said, all that matters is personal faith and devotion. Strong, opposing voices were heard from both communities — but in the end, the two groups ended up claiming Kabir as their own. What is the situation today? Is Kabir claimed by one or the other or by both? What is the ‘Muslim view’ and the ‘Hindu view’, respectively, of Kabir — if there are indeed separate views worth mentioning. Is there a unified picture, or distinctly different views withheld by the different communities?

1.2 The Structure of the Essay

After some remarks in the following section on the methodology for interviews and some notes on the literature, a backdrop to the times of Kabir will be given (section 2.1 on page 13). In order to appreciate the role Kabir played — and, thus, to be able to better understand the answers the respondents gave — there is a need to have a basic understanding of Hinduism (section 2.1.1 on page 13) as well as Islam, particularly in which ways the two religions can at times seem to clash (section 2.1.2 on page 14). Additionally,

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5 See section 2.3.1 on page 34
6 The official name of the city of Banaras today, is Varanasi. The oldest name for the city, however, is Kashi. Kashi, or Kashikā, is the shining one; the city of light. Vārānasī, the official name, is also an ancient one. This name is derived from the geographical location of the city — it’s situated between the rivers Varanā and Asi. According to Eck, the name ‘Banaras’, which is by which the city is most widely known today, is a corrupt version of ‘Bārānasi’ — which is the Pali version of Vārānasī. Under the rule of the British, as well as the Muslims, the city was known as ‘Benares’. Other names for the city is Avimukta, the never forsaken; Ānandavana, the forest of bliss; Rudravāsa, the city of Shiva; Mahāshmashāna, the great cremation ground. (Diana L. Eck, Banaras: City of Light, reprint 1999, [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], pp. 25–26, 28, 29, 31, 32)
7 Scholarly opinions and theories concerning Kabir are discussed below at 2.3 on page 34
three groups or movements will briefly be introduced: the Bhakti movement (section 2.1.3 on page 15); the Sufis (section 2.1.4 on page 17); and the Nāths (section 2.1.5 on page 19). All three are essential for understanding Kabīr, and each will frequently be mentioned throughout the essay.

The following sections will introduce Kabīr as he is found in legends (section 2.2.1 on page 20) on the one hand, and in poems (section 2.2.2 on page 29), on the other hand. Both the legends and the poems need to be included, as the persona of Kabīr is portrayed quite differently depending where you look. The most famous legends are briefly retold. In the discussion about the poems of Kabīr, focus will be on the different images of Kabīr that can be distinguished although the language of Kabīr will be touched upon, as will his signature ulaṭbāṃsī poems. There will be no section as such with quotes of Kabīr’s poems, but they will rather be scattered throughout the essay. A full list of all quotes mentioned in the text is found in appendix B.1 on page 61, and some additional ones that were mentioned in the essay but too long to include in-text are found at appendix B.2 on page 61.

Next will be a brief summary of the scholarly debate about Kabīr. Starting with some notes the biography of Kabīr (section 2.3.1 on page 34), and moving on to a quite lengthy discussion about the dating of Kabīr (section 2.3.2 on page 35). Although this essay is about the image of Kabīr, particularly as seen by the Julāhā and Yadav in certain areas of Banāras, and not primarily about the historical figure of Kabīr, the latter should not be completely ignored. Through the discussion about the dates of Kabīr, a critical light will be shed, in particular, on the legends of Kabīr.

The religious identity of Kabīr will be explored in sections 2.3.3 on page 39; 2.3.4 on page 40; 2.3.5 on page 41 and 2.3.6 on page 42.

Finally, the turn will come to the actual research, the survey undertaken in Banāras. In section 2.4 on page 43 the answers of the respondents will be summarized and discussed. The discussion will continue further in section 3 on page 48 where the conclusions will be found as well.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Selection of Interview Subjects

To answer the question at hand, people from two sets of groups — one Hindu and one Muslim — were interviewed. For the answers to be comparable, there is a need to make sure that the individuals would have a somewhat similar background and education, as well as the two groups to be generally comparable with each other — again, having somewhat similar circumstances regarding background and education. Men and women
in equal numbers have been interviewed from both groups.

For the Hindu group, the caste Yadav was chosen. Yadav are traditionally milkmen. They’re considered as being of the varṇa high Shudra or low Vaishya — that is, they’re not one of the lowest jatis, but nor are they of the highest. Thus it can be expected that they have some education, but not that they would be highly educated. Five Yadav men and five Yadav women, from two neighbouring locations: Asi and Nagwa, were interviewed.

An obvious group to interview amongst Muslims were weavers. They are a distinct group, and are of somewhat similar social status as Yadav amongst Hindus. Relatively low, that is, but not of the lowest strata. It would be probable that they would have some degree of education, but improbable that they would have a University degree or some such\[8\] However, originally weavers was to be avoided as interview-subjects, because Kabīr himself was a weaver\[9\] It would seem natural that weavers would have a stronger tradition of Kabīr; that they would remember him better, maybe have more stories of him circulating in the oral tradition, than the average group would have.

Another Muslim group that seemed to be comparative in relation to the Hindu Yadav, was ricksha wallahs. For quite some time my assistant tried to find people willing to be interviewed; some even volunteered, but when it came down to actually doing the interview, something always came up. The subject was either was ill, travelling, too tired, or simply suddenly unwilling at the moment. In the end, it was simply too difficult to find willing subjects from this group. Focus was again turned to the weavers; they became the subjects in the Muslim group. It turned out that both the respondents education and knowledge of Kabīr was comparable to the Hindu group — it was, indeed, very similar —, yet it should be noted that this Muslim group might not, for the reasons mentioned above, be representable for the Muslim community in general.

1.3.2 Method for Interviews

**Why interviews** Since it’s not certain that all subjects would be literate, in addition to the fact that written questionnaires would, in itself, probably be somewhat odd for the subjects, oral interviews is chosen as the only method for questioning the subjects.

**Assistants** Mr. Ashish Yadav, my assistant located both the men and the women from the group of Yadav, as well as the men from the group of weavers. It was also with him

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\[8\]Reportedly 100% of the boys and 93% of the girls in India does start in school. Although education is free up to the tenth class, only 50% completes fifth grade. (‘Indien: utbildning’, in Nationalencyclopedins Internettjänst, URL: [http://www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) [visited on 05/20/2008] [henceforth cited as Nationalencyclopedins Internettjänst])

\[9\]See section 2.3.1 on page 34
that the aforementioned interviews were conducted. Interviews with the women among Muslim weavers were conducted with Ms. Mamta Yadav. Originally, Mr. Ashish tried to wind respondents among the Muslim women for himself, but it soon became apparent that it would not do; none were willing to partake in the survey. Thus, Ms. Mamta’s services were employed.

Both assistants have worked as translators for scholars before. Even though they don’t have any education for the job per se, they are experienced assistants.

How the interviews were conducted The interviews were semi-formal. There was a specific set of questions, asked in a specific order by the assistant, and, in most cases no or very few follow up questions. The questions asked were open and large in scope.

Some of the things that needed to be established was, for instance, the subjects views of what the religion of Kabir was; where and how one should find God, according to Kabir; Kabir and the social structure — what his views were and what his impact on it, if any, was —; if the subjects have any favourite poems of Kabir, and, if that’s the case, which is it and what is it that he or she likes in the poem. I had some help with discerning what might be of interest by Prof. Mohammad Toha, who also was interviewed at a later stage due to his role at the Zintul Islam Girls’ School.

Mr. Virendra Singh, an established Hindi teacher with years of experience, translated the questions from English to Hindi. Thereafter the method of back-translation was used, as Mr. Ashish translated the Hindi sentences to English. Some small modifications were made to the sentences proposed by Mr. Singh, as it was important that Mr. Ashish felt confident with the questions — it was, after all, his job to ask them as well as interpret the answers into English.

The whole interview was done in Hindi, which is the language most comfortable for the subject, and recorded with a voice recorder by the author. Later, all of the recordings, including the interviews where Mamta Yadav was assisting, were translated with Mr. Ashish, and then transcribed.

Things to note concerning the interviews On reading the transcribed interviews, it is important to note that the choice of wording is Mr. Ashish’s, not the subjects. The transcription is not a word-by-word translation of what the subjects said, but rather of Mr. Ashish’s translation, where he sought to convey the meaning of the respondents answers.

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10 See section C on page 67, the questionnaire is available in both English and Hindi.
11 Appendix D.5.2 on page 91, Mohammad Toha, Professor of Sociology and a leading figure in the Zintul Islam Girls’ School, Reori Talab, Dec. 12, 2007.
12 Questionnaire, English as well as Hindi, is found in appendix C on page 67.
13 See appendix D on page 69.
Mr. Ashish’s words are transcribed as closely as possible, in order to not further distance the written words from what the subjects originally intended to say. The sentences are often awkward; the grammar is off and words are missing. This should by no means seen as reflecting how the subjects spoke. It is simply a result of the effort to stay as close to my assistant’s translation as possible.

Another thing worth keeping in mind when the results are reviewed, is that my assistant during the interviews with the Muslim women was different than with the other three groups. Mr. Ashish and Ms. Mamta did confer with each other, and with the author, before the interviews to make sure they asked the questions in a similar fashion, etc. Yet it is still likely that they posed the questions in a somewhat different fashion, perhaps put emphasis on different areas, and so on. By and large, one could assume it would have an effect on the respondents answers as well.

Furthermore, it is possible that the short replies from some of the Hindu women are due to the fact that it was a man, Mr. Ashish, that was posing the questions.

1.3.3 Literature

**Vaudeville** Charlotte Vaudeville is an author mentioned by virtually all scholars, specifically her *Kabir*. [14] Monika Horstmann, herself a Kabir scholar, even stated that Vaudeville ‘completed’ research of Kabir with the study mentioned above, at least as far as the study of Kabir as a historical person goes. [15] For this paper, a revised edition of *Kabir* has been used: *A Weaver Named Kabir*. [16]

**Hess** Linda Hess as a scholar of Kabir whose authority might rival Vaudeville’s. In this essay two articles of Hess’s has been used: “Kabir’s Rough Rhetoric” [17] where the style of Kabir is discussed, and “Three Kabir Collections: A Comparative Study” [18] where Hess analyzes the different collections of Kabir’s poems.

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Keay One of the best descriptions of the followers of Kabûr’s path — the Kabûr Panth — was found in F. E. Keay’s Kabir and His Followers. Keay gives an introduction to the environment of Kabûr, as well as a general overview over the history, organization, and doctrines of the different branches of the Kabûr Panthis. Although it is dated in some areas, it is nevertheless of use in others.

Lorenzen Another prominent scholar of Kabûr, is David N. Lorenzen. In Kabir Legends he goes through the main legends of Kabûr, as well a short history of Kabûr including a thorough discussion of the dates of Kabûr.

Bharati and Flood For some basic understanding of Hinduism in general and Hindu way of life, Gavin Flood’s An Introduction to Hinduism and Agehananda Bharati’s Hindu Views and Ways and the Hindu-Muslim Interface were used.

General information and dictionaries For some general references, online dictionaries such as The Oxford Dictionary of English (revised edition), Encyclopædia Britannica Online, and Nationalencyclopedins Internettjänst was used. Additionally, Benjamin Walkers Hindu World proved invaluable for looking up information concerning various terms and phenomena about Hinduism and Indian culture in general.

Other Other, complementing literature has been used as well. A good number of valuable sources was found in anthologies such as The Sants by Karine Schomer and W.H. Schomer and Joseph S. Sirkeci, Vedic Hinduism for the Western Mind: An Introduction to the Spiritual Philosophy of the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2005).

19 ‘Panth’ means ‘way of’ or ‘path of’. Thus the Kabûr Panth means the way of Kabûr. It can be seen as something like ‘school of’, tradition or cult. (David N. Lorenzen, “Introduction”, in: Religious Movements in South Asia (600-1800), ed. by David N. Lorenzen, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 1–44, p. 5) Also see sampradaya and parampara in note 60 on page 17.


22 See section 2.3.2 on page 35.


26 Encyclopædia Britannica Online, URL: [http://search.eb.com](http://search.eb.com) (visited on 05/20/2008).

27 Nationalencyclopedins Internettjänst, URL: [http://www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) (visited on 05/20/2008).

2 Research

2.1 The Times of Kabīr

2.1.1 Hinduism

To understand the tumult surrounding Kabīr and his times, there is a need for some short words concerning Hinduism in general.

When speaking of Christianity, Buddhism or Islam, there are some basic beliefs which are held by followers of respective paths. The same can only with great difficulty be said about Hinduism.\(^\text{32}\) The western concept of religion was developed from an understanding of religion stemming from Christianity.\(^\text{33}\) The closest term to ‘religion’ in an Indian context would be ‘dhārma’. It is, however, a term of much broader meaning than ‘religion’. Religion might be defined as the Oxford dictionary puts it: “the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods […] a particular system of faith and worship”.\(^\text{34}\) Dhārma, on the other hand, is the order of the universe; it is moral laws, right and wrong for individuals and groups. Dhārma means the law of man as well as the law of nature; it is the way of life for all, even for the universe itself.\(^\text{35}\) It has been said that Hinduism is “all things to all men”\(^\text{36}\) and that “every good man is a Hindu”\(^\text{37}\). Although the last two statements paint a rather too broad a picture, it should nevertheless be noted that it isn’t nonsensical to make that kind of broad statements of Hinduism. It is that difficult to define it.\(^\text{38}\)

Christianity defines itself through a founder, or rather: a series of founders; by a declaration of faith. There are central authorities that decide what Christianity is and should be. This is not the case with Hinduism. Hinduism, in contrast, has no founder; there is no unified system of beliefs, no central authority that tells you what is right and...
what is not\textsuperscript{39}. Furthermore, there is no behaviour that can be said to be demonstrated by all Hindus everywhere\textsuperscript{40}.

One of the reasons for this broadness, this vagueness of the term — the diversity and openness in Hinduism —, is that religious practice was individualized from the beginning in Indian culture. Every individual could practice faith as he or she saw fit — by which is meant that beliefs do not matter, nor the following of one or another god. What matters is what kind of person you are; if you have the proper moral conduct and character. This enabled the Indian culture to integrate a multitude of worldviews, a great variety of groups of people\textsuperscript{41}.

As a sociological concept, to be ‘Hindu’ is basically to belong to a certain social group. In this sense, one becomes a Hindu by being born into a group within the Hindu society; no actions need to be taken; no beliefs have to be accepted\textsuperscript{42}. In a religious sense, it’s more complex. Flood utilizes prototype theory\textsuperscript{43} to argue that Hinduism is a category, albeit one with ‘fuzzy edges’. There are some prototypical forms of Hindu practice and belief — some that are clearly Hindu —, and there are other practices and beliefs that aren’t as clearly Hindu but nevertheless belong to the same category. On it’s fuzzy borders, as it were\textsuperscript{44}.

### 2.1.2 The Challenge of Islam

The times preceding Kabīr were turbulent, to say the least. India was confronted with a phenomena that not only challenged the fundamentals of Hinduism as a religious concept, but confronted Hinduism at its sociological core as well. This was the challenge of Islam. Generally speaking, the Muslim religion was not individualized, in the manner Hinduism was described as above, but collectivized. It was expected that the group would follow a certain set of behavioural rules; religious rituals were to be done in a certain way; one should believe in a particular god, and that god alone. Additionally, and more importantly, other groups who were adopted by the whole were assimilated, they had to abandon their cultural characteristics. Moreover, Islam was a well organized religion. This was one of the main factors that made the challenge it posed a serious one\textsuperscript{45}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{39}Flood 1996, p. 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{40}Bharati 1981, p. 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{42}Bharati 1981, pp. 4, 42, 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{43}An alternative might have been to use Ludvig Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance. (See ‘language, philosophy of’, in Encyclopædia Britannica Online)
  \item \textsuperscript{44}Flood 1996, p. 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{45}Dwivedi 2004, pp. 269, 271.
\end{itemize}
A more specific conflict between the two systems of ideas originated from the Hindu Varna system — or rather, how it had come to be implemented. Although the ideas behind the Varna system were for the good of society, it nevertheless had led to groups of people being “shut out from all the good that a civilized society could provide”, as Barthwal puts it. When tribes or other groups had been incorporated into Hindu culture, they had also gotten a place in the Varna system. The incorporated group became situated somewhere in the Varna system, but were not forced to adopt a certain behaviour or beliefs; they did not have to abandon their cultural identity — in contrast to the assimilation of groups into Islam. However there was, as was noted above, a division between high and low. And this was something people had gotten used to.

This was not the case within Islam. Everyone was considered equal. If someone would convert from Hinduism to Islam, he would be considered equal with every other Muslim — regardless of his original social status. Thus it was only natural, when taking this into consideration, that a lot of people were beginning to ask why some would be considered to be more than others within Hindu society. One of these enquiring minds was Kabir.

Although there were many from within both the Hindu and the Muslim fold who spoke ill of the other, there was also groups within both communities that spoke of peace and unity. Most prominently, there were the renunciates: yogis like the Nath among the Hindus, and sufis among the Muslims. There was also Guru Nanak and the Sikh.

2.1.3 Bhakti

The Bhakti movement is a very important part of the times of Kabir. Whereas traditional Hinduism — if such a term can be used — was primarily concerned with rituals, the Bhakti movement changed the focus. In Bhakti, the kernel is instead the devotees love for God, and God’s love for the devotee. In Bhakti, there is no need for knowledge — but of faith. The devotee doesn’t have to do certain acts, rituals or some such. One might even say, that in Bhakti the notion of karma is dispelled — “god’s grace is greater than man’s sin.” All one needs to do is to believe. In Bhakti, all acts, even all thoughts, can be regarded as offerings for the divine. Furthermore, it’s an egalitarian movement in

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50 There has been claims of ties between Kabir and the Nath (see section 2.3.4 on page 40) as well as between Kabir and the Sufis (see section 2.3.5 on page 41).
51 See section 2.3.2 on page 37.
52 See the poem “Moko kaham dhundhe re bande” in appendix B.2 on page 62.
that caste, gender and other superficial differences are of no matter. In God’s eyes, all are equal. All that matters is one’s devotion.

In the harsh words of Kabir:

It’s all one skin and bone, one piss and shit, one blood, one meat. From one drop, a universe. Who’s Brahmin? Who’s Shudra? [...] Kabir says, plunge into Ram.

Says Kabir: No one is lowly born. The only lowly are those who never talk of Ram.

The Bhakti movement emerged in south India, in the Tamilnadu, around the seventh century. At this time, myths about the gods and goddesses from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as the Puranas, were beginning to have certain standard forms. Bhakti peaked between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century, but had an enormous impact on Hinduism well before that, and still has today. The force of the Bhakti movement was such, that virtually all Hindu movements formed after the seventh century have been based on Bhakti, in one way or the other. It is, as Schomer puts it, what gives “present-day Hinduism its emotional texture, its spiritual and social values, and its basic philosophical assumptions.”

A foundation for early Bhakti were the poet-saints Álvârs. Later Hindu movements have also often been led, at least initially, by so-called poet-saints. Saints such as Kabir. The Álvârs were Vaishnav and even later on, it is common for bhaktas is general to have a Vaishnav orientation, so to speak. That said, even early on there where Shaiva bhaktas — such as the Nâyanârs — and others. The most important order in the south, the Sri Vaishnavas, were directly influenced by the Álvârs.

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58 Here, ‘bhaktas’ are used designating devotees within the Bhakti movement in general. Another, common, use of ‘bhakta’ is for followers or saints within the saguna branch. Followers or saints within the nirguna branch are called Sants. See more below, paragraph Nirguna.

59 See Ramanuja at 107 on page 22.

Today, we separate bhaktas into two separate groups, those who follow a *saguna* path of Bhakti, and those who follow a *nirguna* path. It should be noted that the categories are not something the early bhaktas themselves discerned, but a nineteenth century idea.

**Saguna** Bhakti emphasizes faith, but also one’s emotions and body. The latter, i.e., the devotees body, can be seen as the point where God is in the world. At times, the worship can take an ecstatic form. The body can be seen as the point where God is in the world. In Saguna Bhakti in particular, the God which is worshipped is a tangible one. The divine has characteristics. The most typical form of Saguna Bhakti might be the Vaishnava who focuses on *viraha Bhakti*.

Of the Kabir-vani — the Words of Kabir —, two collections (the *Kabir-granthavalI* and the Gurü Granth Sāhib) emphasize bhakti and have general Vaishnava tendencies of a somewhat Saguna nature. The third (the *Bijak*), on the other hand, is clearly more Nirguna.

**Nirguna** Within Nirguna Bhakti there is the same focus on devotion, but here the divine is transcendent and indescribable. The divine is without characteristics. Kabir is often thought of as the archetypical example of a nirguna Sant. For an illustrative quote, see section 2.3.6 on page 42.

The main sampradayas are the Kabir Panthis, the Ravidasis, the Dadu Panthis and the Sikhs.

### 2.1.4 The Sufis

It has been claimed that Kabir himself would have been a sufi; this will be discussed later. But it may be apt at this time to note some characteristics of ‘Sufism’. In

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61 Schomer 1987, p. 3.
62 ‘Sa-guna’ literally means ‘has attributes.’ (‘God’, in Walker 2005a, p. 394)
65 ‘Sant’ means ‘good man’. It is used designating saints within the Nirguna branch of the Bhakti tradition, but may also be used referring to saints in general who lived between the thirteenth and seventeenth century or the so called ‘poet-saints’ found in northern and central India from the fourteenth century and onwards. (Flood 1996, pp. 142, 144; Vaudeville 1987, p. 21)
66 ‘Sampradaya’, can be translated as ‘tradition’ or a system where there is a succession of teacher-disciples — called santana or parampara; the latter can also be used naming a genealogy. Analogous to sampradaya is *panth*. (See note 19 on page 12) Western terms which roughly is used designating parallel phenomena is ‘cult’, ‘tradition’ or ‘school (of)’. (Flood 1996, pp. 16, 134; Lorenzen 2004, p. 5)
68 See section 2.3.5 on page 41.
the times of Kabir, Sufism had made a large impact on culture in general, especially in Northern India throughout which it had spread. And, it should be added, Sufism and its philosophy wasn’t only known to small groups, but to the wide masses.

As a Muslim movement, the base for Sufi belief is the Koran and the hadiths. Shar'i law isn’t rejected, but is seen as the bare minimum one should follow. It is the first step, but only a part of the outer form of religious life. A true religious life is one imbued with devotion. A devotion, a love for the divine so strong, that the Sufis believed the ego-centered self had to die in order to be able to rest in God. Rituals and such are of no importance — all that matters is faith. Thus, for instance, undertaking the hajj is unnecessary: “The Kaaba is in the faithful worshipper’s heart.” Indeed, what sufis strive for is to find God within themselves; to achieve union with God. The first step, shari'at, is following shar'i'a; the second, tariqat, is to worship the divine in ones mind; knowledge is the third step, marifat; and finally, the fourth step, fanâ, is to have certainty of the union with the divine. Common methods to achieve this are poverty and chastity; reciting Gods names over and over; and music and song.

There are many parallels between the Sufis and the bhaktas. The recitation of Gods names as mentioned above, as a means of approaching the divine, is called japa within Bhakti, and dhikr in Sufism. Most importantly, the relationship between the divine and the devotee are in both groups seen as a love relationship. The likeness is even more striking between the Sufis and the nirguna Sants. For both, the divine is without attributes. The Sants describe the devine as aparampāra (beyond the beyond) and Sufis say it’s wāra’l-wāra (behind the behind).

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69Vaudeville 1993 p. 83.
72‘Hajj’ is the fifth pillar of Islam, the pilgrimage to Mecca. (‘Hajj’, in Nationalencyclopedins Interнетjänst).
73Vaudeville 1993 p. 173, note 27.
74Keay 1996 p. 91.
75Esposito 2001 p. 149.
76‘Bhaktas’ are again, as explained in note 58 on page 16 used designating followers of the Bhakti movement in general, not merely those of the saguna branch.
Knowledge in front, knowledge in back,  
knowledge right and left.  
The knowledge beyond knowledge  
is my knowledge.\(^\text{78}\)

The devotees love of the divine can be so intense that it can be said to be a suffering, called *ishq* in Sufi terminology. This is a theme that isn’t found in the tradition of the Nāths\(^\text{79}\) nor in the Bhakti poetry — not before the Sants, that is. Kabīr is one of the first Sants, and indeed one who describe the relationship to the divine in just such a way. In Hindu terminology, it’s called *viraha*. It has been claimed that Kabīr got this notion by influences from the Sufi, and that *viraha* then spread to Bhakti in general.\(^\text{80}\)

*The snake of Virah has crept in my body,*  
it has bitten the inmost heart,  
Yet the saint does not flinch:  
“Let it bite as it pleases”, says he\(^\text{81}\)

Bhakti is, however, not the only ‘movement’ that bears parallels to Sufism. Several scholars has pointed out kinship in thought between the Sufis and *the yogis*. Especially in North India — where Banāras, home of Kabīr, is situated —, there seem to have been close connections between the two groups.\(^\text{82, 83}\)

### 2.1.5 The Nāths

The Nāths, also known as *Kāṇphaṭa*\(^\text{84}\) or *Gorakhnāthī Yogīs*, are — as the latter name suggests — a group of haṭha yogīs. Their main focus is perfecting the body so that they can attain immortality. The use of different forms of drugs is common. According to Walker, both Kabīr and Nānak criticized the Nāth. There is a vast amount of legends concerning the Nāths and of the supernatural powers they wielded. The Nāths originally came from North India, but figures in at least Nepal, Bengal and Assam.\(^\text{85}\)

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\(^\text{78}\) Kabīr, *sākhī* 188 in Hess and Singh 1983, p. 112.

\(^\text{79}\) See section 2.1.5.

\(^\text{80}\) Lawrence 1987, p. 369.


\(^\text{82}\) Vaudeville 1993, pp. 83–84.

\(^\text{83}\) The Nāths have even claimed that none other than the Prophet Muhammad himself was a disciple of Gorakh Nāth. (Vaudeville 1993, p. 84)

\(^\text{84}\) *Kāṇphaṭa*, means ‘ear-split’. The Nāths were so called because of their initiation rite, a part of which was the splitting of the ear cartilage. This enabled them to wear very large ear rings. (‘Gorakhnāth’, in Walker 2005b, p. 402)

\(^\text{85}\) *Nāṭha*, in Walker 2005b, p. 128; Vaudeville 1993 pp. 37, 74–75.
The founder of the Nāths was guru Gorakh Nāth. He is a figure of legendary status. According to some stories, he was born from the sweat of Lord Shiva’s breast; according to others Gorakh is the child between Shiva and a cow. However he was born, the connection between him and Lord Shiva is important. Shiva is the first Nāth, the Ādi-nāth. The second Nāth was Matsyendra. Matsyendranāth was the one who initiated Gorakh.

Gorakh Nāth probably lived between the ninth and twelfth century, perhaps the later date is somewhat more likely. There are legends connecting him with Kabīr but given the early date of Gorakh Nāth, is highly improbable that they ever met.

Something that links the Nāths to Kabīr as well as both strains of Bhakti, is their disregard for the Hindu hierarchy of different casts. There were so called Untouchables and low-caste people among the Nāths, as well as people from ‘higher’ varnas. Kabīr frequently mentions yogīs in general, or even Nāths in particular, in his poems. This will be discussed more in section 2.3.4 on page 40.

There is also good deal of literature written inside the tradition of the Nāths. Some of this is very similar to the poems in upside-down language, the uḷaṭbāṃśi poems of Kabīr. Even today, wandering yogīs in the North and Northeast of India sing uḷaṭbāṃśi songs that sometimes are said to be of Kabīr’s hand, sometimes of Gorak Nāth’s.

2.2 Where Kabīr can be Found

2.2.1 Legends of Kabīr

Besides the poems that are attributed to Kabīr there are also some collections of legendary material about him. For a long time, the oldest sources known was the Sikh Ādi Granth, dating to 1604, and Nābhāji’s Bhaktamāl of around 1600–1625. Nābhāji’s entry on Kabīr is actually seemingly objective and, thus, useful as a source of Kabīr as a

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86Matsyendra is also known as Macchendra. In Bengali tradition Macchendra is identified with Minanāth. Minanāth, in turn, is the ancient protector of Nepal, and Buddhists believe Minanāth to be none other than Avalokiteśvara, the Buddha of Compassion. (Vaudeville 1993, p. 74; ‘Avalokiteśvara’ in Nationalencyclopedins Internettjänst)
89For more on the legends of Kabīr and Gorakh Nāth, see section 2.2.1 on page 27.
90For more on the dates of Kabīr, see section 2.3.2 on page 35.
91Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, p. 45.
92For more on uḷaṭbāṃśi poems, see section 2.2.2 on page 32.
94See section 2.2.2 on page 32.
95Ādi Granth, the holy scripture of the Sikhs. It is also known as the Gurū Granth Sāhib. (‘Sikh’, in Walker 2005a, p. 396)
96Bhaktamāl, a collection of legends about a variety of Vaishnav saints by the poet Nābhāji. (‘Hindi’, in Walker 2005a, p. 442; Vaudeville 1993, p. 43)
historical figure. The legendary material as such, is introduced Priyādās’s commentary. More recently, we also have the Parachāī of Ananta-das, which possibly dates back to 1588, which makes it the oldest source at our disposal. Additional sources containing legends of Kabīr that might be mentioned are the Kabīr Panthi *Kabīr-kasautī* and the *Kabīr-caritra*.

The most common legends about Kabīr are retold here. They give a backdrop which is valuable for understanding the answers given by the respondents. Hypothetically, what is known to laymen is not the scholarly discussion about Kabīr’s biography, but rather some poems and legends. Additionally, some legends are of interest concerning the dating of Kabīr. The legends are retold without concern of whether they might have actually happened or not. Of interest here are only the legends themselves.

It might also be noted that the search for an ‘authentic’ person, the historical person, as it were, which is so common among Western scholars is just that — a primarily Western approach. Kabīr is situated within a tradition which has not, until recent times, made an effort to discern fact from story. Thus, we cannot possibly succeed in finding the historical Kabīr. The legends serve a purpose. They communicate something about Kabīr, nevermind if they’re fact or fiction. Thus, it is worthwhile — maybe even necessary — to at least summarize the legends.

As with the poems — and virtually anything concerning Kabīr — there are various versions of the legends. For the following, primarily Ananta-das Parachāī in Lorenzen’s *Kabir Legends* and Chapter 11 in Keay’s *Kabir and His Followers* have been used.

### Birth of Kabīr

In the earliest accounts, the story begins with Kabīr being found by Julāhā — that is, Muslim weavers. Early on, and common among Kabīr Panthi versions, Kabīr is depicted as an avatar of the divine. In all accounts, Kabīr is adopted and brought up by foster parents. It seems that without exception legends speak about Kabīr being found by coincidence, as it were, by the Julāhā that will adopt him. Especially by Kabīr Panthis, the divinity of Kabīr is stressed; quite often Kabīr and possibly his parents — real or adopted — are made out to be more Hindu than was the case in the earliest descriptions. In some versions we read that although Niru and Niṃa, which

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98 More on the dates of Kabīr in section 2.3.2 on page 35.
99 This said, we can still try. See section 2.3 on page 34.
100 Lawrence 1987, pp. 359–360.
101 Raghav-das’s *Bhaktamāl* from about 1720 and Mahipati’s *Bhaktavijay* from about 1762. (Lorenzen 1992, pp. 20, 44)
102 Mahipati’s *Bhaktavijay* (ca 1762) and Paramananda-das’s *Kabir Manshur* (1887) among others. (Lorenzen 1992, pp. 21, 44)
103 Lorenzen 1992 pp. 43–45.
Kabir’s foster parents often are called, were Julahā, they had in fact been Hindus, even Brāhmins, but had lost their status.\(^{104}\)

Lorenzen reports a different version to be prominent in the oral tradition;\(^{105}\) this is also the one that Keay tells;\(^{106}\) Here, a Brāhmin takes his daughter, a virgin and a widow, to see swami Rāmānanda.\(^{107}\) As a kind gesture — but not knowing she was a widow —, Rāmānanda wishes her the blessing of a son. The blessing could not be taken back, and the daughter gave birth to a son.\(^{108}\) To escape the dishonour that a widow giving birth to a baby would ensue, the mother leaves baby Kabir behind. The story then continues as above; Julahā finds Kabir, and raises him.\(^{109}\)

**Initiation by Rāmānanda** One of the most common stories told about Kabir, is how he tricked swami Rāmānanda\(^{110}\) to initiate him. The legend is included in the *Parachai* as well as in most later collections.\(^{111}\)

Some versions of the legend start off with God telling Kabir to don the Vaishnava tika and prayer beads. This was not something Kabir felt he could do, as he was

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\(^{104}\) Lorenzen 1992, p. 45.  
\(^{105}\) Lorenzen 1992, p. 47.  
\(^{107}\) Swami Rāmānanda was, according to the hagiographies of the Vaishnava, of the lineage of Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja (born 1017) founded one of the early strands of Bhakti, the Srivaishnavas. (Burton Stein, “Social Mobility and Medieval South Indian Hindu Sects”, in: *Religious Movements in South Asia (600-1800)*, ed. by David N. Lorenzen, [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004], pp. 81–102, p. 87) Rāmānanda disagreed with some of Rāmānuja’s teachings, and founded his own lineage — the Ramanandi sect — in Banaras (Schomer 1987, pp. 4–5). This sect was called the Bairagi, and was open to all. Ramanandi’s disciples included Brāhmins and Kshatriya — including a king —, as well as a butcher, a cobbler — both low in the social system —, and Kabir, a Muslim. (Schomer 1987, pp. 4–5; Barthwal 2004, p. 263) For more on Kabir and Rāmānanda, see section 2.3.2 on page 36.  
\(^{108}\) It is interesting to note that the name of this daughter, the name of Kabir’s mother, is not mentioned in any of the literary sources. A respondent, however, did. Sri Mayaram Yadav called her Urvasi. (Sri Mayaram Yadav, 65 years old, from Nagwa, Oct. 31, 2007, appendix D.1.3 on page 71)  
\(^{110}\) For information on Rāmānanda, see note 107.  
\(^{111}\) Lorenzen 1992, pp. 23–24.  
\(^{112}\) Vaishnav, are the group who are devoted to Vaishnavism — i.e. devoted to Vishnu and/or one or the other of his incarnations. The most popular incarnations are, of course, Rām and Krīṣṇa. (Vaishnavism’, in Walker 2005a, p. 541)  
\(^{113}\) Tilaka, or tika, are sometimes called ‘caste marks’. This is, however, not quite an exhaustive description. There are those who put on the marks — which usually are of red, white, or yellow colour — to show their devotion. The truly devout are to have marks on several parts of their body, though most are content with a dot in their forehead. Women can have them as a sign of faithfulness to their husband. You also don a dot on your forehead for having been close to the divine; for having had darshan of the divine. This might have been by attending a puja, a service to God. (Walker 2005a, pp. 207–208; Marc J. Katz, *The Children of Assi – The Transference of Religious Traditions and Communal Inclusion in Banaras*, [Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing, 2007], p. 131) From personal experience, it might be added that sometimes it is even enough to have been close to a puja being conducted. After all, that would mean you would have been close to the divine.
Where Kabîr can be Found

a Muslim — but God told him that he would be initiated into Vaîshnavism by swâmi Râmânanda. Other versions begin with Kabîr singing the praise of lord Râm — which the Brâhmins protests against; they also complain about Kabîr not having a guru. To remedy this, Kabîr seeks out Râmânanda.

Whether out of instruction from God or Kabîr’s own wit, according to the legends this is what followed. Every morning swâmi Râmânanda took a bath in the holy Gaṅgâ — at Pañchgaṅgâ ghât, as tradition would have it. Kabîr lays down on the stairs, waiting for Râmânanda. In some legends, Kabîr has taken the form of a child. As Râmânanda comes walking, he accidentally steps on Kabîr. One variant of the legend tells that Râmânanda has Kabîr to say “Ram, Ram!” to console him; others state that Râmânanda exclaims “Ram!” in surprise. In any event Kabîr takes the uttering of Ram’s name as his mantra, although this was not the intention of Râmânanda. As Kabîr returns home, he puts on the clothes of a Vaîshnav sâdhu and claims to be a disciple of Râmânanda. When asked, Râmânanda denies this, and so Kabîr is brought in front of Râmânanda. Kabîr reminds Râmânanda of what happened at the stairs — and, after some trials, additionally convinces Râmânanda that he’d be a good disciple. In the end, he is accepted as a disciple.

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[115] For more information on who Râmânanda was, see note 107 on the previous page.
[116] Brâhmins are one of the four varyas. Sometimes called ‘the priest varna’, which gives an indication of their role. Primarily, their duty is to conduct the daily rites and to study and teach the vedas. (Walker 2005a, p. 168)
[117] Guru, a spiritual teacher or leader. The guru is the keeper of the secrets of the cult. Even though one may know ‘the right words’, they are, as it were, meaningless if they haven’t been conveyed by the guru himself. Only then are the words truly words of power; only then can the mantra lead to enlightenment. (Walker 2005a, p. 419) (Also see note 120)
[120] Mantra, although originally signifying ‘metrical psalms of praise’ it has come to designate ‘words of power’ in general — be it a verse from the Vedas, a spell, or something more cryptic. The belief is that there is power in the sound itself, as well as in the words. Within religious sects, it is often the case that the guru gives his disciple a mantra in the rite of initiation. (Walker 2005b pp. 25, 486) (Also see notes 117 and 121)
[121] Diksha is the rite of initiation into a religious order. It literally means ‘enhallowment’, which gives an indication of its purpose: to raise someone from the profane to the sacred. Usually done by the guru — the last part of the diksha is the whispering of the mantra (see note 120) into the ear of the disciple. (Walker 2005a pp. 485–486)
[122] Sâdhu, is a common term designating an ascetic or a wonderworker. Strictly speaking though, a sâdhu is one who has attained siddhis. (‘Sâdhu’, in Walker 2005b p. 322) For more on siddhis, see note 156 on page 27.
Tested by Sikandar Lodi  Some of the more popular legends about Kabir are about him being tested by the emperor Sikandar Lodi\(^{124}\). It is not only mentioned in most hagiographies about Kabir, but also, albeit without mentioning Sikandar by name, in the Kabir-granthaval\(i\) as well as the Adi Granth.\(^{125}\)

\[
\text{Fire does not burn him, water does not drown him.}
\]
\[
\text{His chains simply fall away.}
\]
\[
\text{The devotee Harid\(\breve{a}\) says: Kabir worships Govinda,}
\]
\[
\text{and his mind becomes free of fear.}
\]
\[
\text{The k\(\mathring{a}\)\(z\)\(i\) calls out: Kill him, kill him.}
\]
\[
\text{Tie him under the elephant's feet.}
\]
\[
\text{The devotee Harid\(\breve{a}\) says: Heat won't burn him.}
\]
\[
\text{Your are the savior, the killers are countless.}
\]
\[
\text{The devotee Harid\(\breve{a}\) says: No one was able}
\]
\[
\text{to weaken Kabir's resolve.}\(^{126}\)
\]

It all started with Sikandar visiting the city of Banaras. Enemies of Kabir — Brâhmins as well as well as mullahs —, even Kabir’s own mother, petitioned Sikandar. They said Kabir had “abandoned the customs of the Muslims and […] broken the touchability rules of the Hindus”; Kabir had “scorned the hope of all religions” and “separated himself from both the Hindus and the Muslims.”\(^{127}\) This had corrupted everyone, and they felt that only by stopping Kabir would both communities again be respected\(^{128}\). Sikandar takes the charges seriously, and sends for Kabir\(^{129}\).

Having arrived, he’s questioned by the k\(\mathring{a}\)\(z\)\(i\) and Sikandar points out that only by following one’s traditional path can salvation be gained. Kabir replies that the k\(\mathring{a}\)\(z\)\(i\)s and the mullahs are the ones who will fall into hell, and, he adds, they’re clumsy. Kabir proclaims to be “faithful to Râm alone.”\(^{131}\)

This made the emperor so furious that he ordered Kabir to be bound in chains and thrown into the river Ga\(\ddot{a}\)g\(\ddot{a}\). But when Kabir touched the holy water, the chains fell off and Kabir himself floated on the water. As water wouldn’t harm him, they tried next

\(^{124}\)For more about Kabir and Lodi, see section 2.3.2 on page 37.

\(^{125}\)Lorenzen 1992, p. 20; Keay 1996, p. 32. For information on Adi Granth, see note 95 on page 20.

\(^{126}\)Excerpt of poem attributed to Haridas Niranjan\(i\) in David N. Lorenzen, Praises to a Formless God: Nirgu\(\ddot{n}\)\(i\) Texts from North India, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997), p. 159.


\(^{130}\)K\(\mathring{a}\)\(z\)\(i\), also known as Kadi or Qadi, is a Muslim judge who only hears religious cases and makes decisions based on Shari’ah. (‘kadi’, in Encyclopædia Britannica Online)

with fire. Kabir was again tied and this time thrown into a house which was set on fire. The house burned down; the ashes flew up and Kabir walked out unharmed. The people knew they had witnessed a miracle, but the kázís and the Bráhmins protested even louder. Even angrier than before, Lodi now called for a frenzied elephant. It had no fears, and had killed several warriors before. But as it was to attack Kabir, Hari[132] took the form of a lion and stood in front of Kabir. The elephant refused to go near Kabir and fled. Now even Sikandar was convinced and bows to Kabir[133]

**Taqqi: Pir and disciple** Although not one of the main legends, the following is still mentioned as it is of interest in relation to the religious identity of Kabir. There are different legends that connects Kabir with Sheikh Taqqi. In some, Taqqi is the rival of Kabir, in others an enemy. In others still he is Kabir’s disciple[134] Some even mention Kabir visiting Sheikh Taqqi in Jhûsî, where Taqqi was the Pir[135] of Kabir[136]

According to some legends, Kabir had a family[137] Among Kabir Panthi’s it has been common to denounce that Kamal and Kamali would have been Kabir’s natural children. Interestingly, Sheikh Taqqi is involved in the legendary material of the Panth concerning both children[138]

Having survived the ordeals at the hands of Sikandar Lodi, Kabir travels to Delhi with Sikandar and Taqqi — the latter having been the chief Pir of Sikandar’s. There, Kamal is resurrected from the dead by Kabir as a response to a challenge issued by Taqqi. Kamali was also resurrected from the dead by Kabir — again through the involvement of Sheikh Taqqi. The dead woman was, as it happened, Taqqis own daughter. The Sheikh asked Kabir to revive her, and he did. But to the dismay of Taqqi the girl proclaimed that she no longer was his, but will live her life at the feet of Kabir[139]

The most common portrait of the relation between Sheikh Taqqi and Kabir is, however, that they were enemies. In Walker[2005a] Taqqi plays the role that Keay has cast to a faqir named Jahangast. Taqqi — or Jahangast — is on his way to see Kabir. Kabir hears about this, and ties a pig up outside his door. Taqqi criticizes Kabir sharply for having an unclean animal at his house. Kabir replies as follows[140]

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[132] Hari, is a name of Krishna and, thus, of Vishnu. Only Râm is more common as a name for the divine in the Paûcheãî, the Adi Granth and the Bijak. (‘Vishnu’, in Walker[2005b], p. 576; Hess[1987b], p. 121)
[135] Pir, a Muslim variant of guru. (Keay[1996] note 2, p. 17) (Also, see note[117] on page 23.)
[137] More on this at section 2.3.1 on page 35
I have tied up what is unclean at my door, but you have tied up what is unclean in your heart. Anger, pride, avarice, etc., are unclean; and these are inside you. What you think to be unclean is not unclean; but anger is unclean.

And so, Keay concludes, the faqir becomes a disciple of Kabir.

The Pandā of Jagannath  A reason for including this legend — as it, perhaps, is not one of the more famous ones — is that it mentions Virasimha Baghel, who plays a role in the dating of Kabir.

At a point of Kabir’s life, he had become famous. People gathered around his house to catch a glimpse of him and glean some of his wisdom. As this wasn’t to Kabir’s liking, he tries to escape this fate by behaving in ways that would diminish his fame. Kabir goes to the home of a prostitute, puts his arm around her and grabs a jug of holy water with the other. Kabir then goes to the market with the prostitute, pretending that the water would be liquor and that he’d be drunk on it. Everything seems to go as planned; the people of the town laugh at Kabir, and even his friends can’t say anything in his defence. The Brähmins, of course, take the opportunity to shame him further.

But this is not the end of the debacle. Kabir — still acting as if drunk — walks up to the king himself, Virasimha Baghel. With Kabir’s fame intact, the king had respected him, and even used to get up from his throne to greet Kabir. Now, Baghel sees no reason to give Kabir that respect but remains seated. —Suddenly, Kabir pours water from the jug he had held on to on his own feet. Surprised, the king asks why Kabir had done this. Kabir explains that by doing this, he had saved the feet of a pandā of the temple of Jagannath in far away Puri. Baghel sends men to verify this. And, indeed, when the men arrive at Puri they find a pandā who tell them that he had broken a pot of boiling rice over his feet. Kabir, who had said to have been a visiting weaver from Kāshī, came running up and poured water on the feet of the pandā. Baghel’s men returned to the king and reported what the pandā had told them. As the king hears this, he takes his family with him and goes to Kabir to show him respect. “Master, forgive our mistake,” the king begs.

Kabir greets the king with the following words:

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141 Keay 1996, p. 18.
143 For the discussion on the dates of Kabir, see 2.3.2 on page 35. Baghel is mentioned on p. 2.3.2 on page 38.
144 Lorenzen 1992, p. 29.
145 A ‘pandā’ is a priest. (Lorenzen 1992, p. 30)
146 ‘Puri’, is identified as Orissa. (Lorenzen 1992, p. 30)
147 Kāshī is one of the names of the city of Banaras. For more on this topic, see note 6 on page 7.
There is no anger in my heart. For me there is no question of either hatred or love, nor any difference between king and commoner. [...] Your coming here has honored me. Whoever gives greatness to others is himself great. A great person is one who consumes wealth by sharing it with others.

Competing with Gorakhnāth  Since the Kabīr Panth competed with the Nāthīs for the support of groups situated low in the social hierarchy, it’s common that Kabīr Panthī texts contain some version of the following legend, where Kabīr and Gorakhnāth competes. It begins with Gorakhnāth asking Kabīr to talk with him. Gorakh plants his trident on the ground, handle first. He takes seat on one of the tridents prongs and invites Kabīr to sit on one of the other prongs. In reply, Kabīr takes out a ball of thread, holding one end in his hand and throwing the ball in the air. The thread aligns itself vertically, and Kabīr climbs the rope to take his seat on the thread. Then, Kabīr invites Gorakhnāth to take his place beside him. Gorakh is thus defeated.

The episode above seems to be the base legend. Some versions add the following episodes: Gorakhnāth challenges Kabīr to find him in a pond. Gorakh transforms himself into a frog, and jumps into the water. But Kabīr doesn’t let him disappear, but quickly grabs hold of him. It is then Kabīr’s turn to issue the same challenge. Kabīr jumps into the pond, at the same time that he transforms himself into water. As Gorakh can’t find him, Kabīr has won again. Later, Gorakhnāth sends two poisonous snakes into Kabīr’s home. He expects the snakes to return to him after biting Kabīr, but when they don’t return he goes to Kabīr’s home and asks him to come out. Kabīr replies that Gorakh should come in instead, as he’s busy serving the two guests that had recently arrived.

Meeting Guru Nānak  There is legendary material from both Sikh and Kabīr Panthī sources about Kabīr and Guru Nānak meeting. In each case, the group lifts up the ‘own character’ as being superior to the other. Some Kabīr Panthī legends uses well known Sikh legends about Nānak alone, such as the entire city of Mecca turning around Nanak’s feet out of respect for him, but places Kabīr in the scenario as well.

One time Kabīr and Nānak met, they were accompanied by the 84 Nāth Siddhas. Siddha, a Siddha is one who has attained such a mastery of himself that he has acquired siddhi — supernatural powers, like the ability to shrink or expand, weightlessness, being able to control other living beings, etc.

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153 Also see section 2.3.2 on page 37.
155 See section 2.1.5 on page 19.
156 Siddha, a Siddha is one who has attained such a mastery of himself that he has acquired siddhi — supernatural powers, like the ability to shrink or expand, weightlessness, being able to control other living beings, etc.
By crushing a single sesame seed in water — water which Kabir had magically made flow in a dried up river — everyone could drink until they were satisfied. On another occasion Kabir asked Nanak to fill his begging bowl with milk. Nanak found a five day old calf, but couldn’t get any milk from it. Kabir instructed Nanak to ask the calf in Kabir’s name, and Nanak did as much. He only had to place the bowl under the calf and make the request, and milk flowed freely.

Death of Kabir

One of the best known legends of all, and one that does a very good job of illustrating the character of Kabir, is of his death in Magahar.

From Kashi he came to Magahar,  
the pir of both religions.  
Some want to bury him some to burn him,  
no one keeps his temper.

It is said that those who die in Banaras achieve moksh. In contrast, popular belief in Banaras would have it that if you die in Magahar, you are reborn as a donkey. It seems that is exactly why Kabir chooses not to die there. To die in Banaras would not show one’s faith in Ram; to die in Banaras would be to take the easy way out.

‘[…] Besides, they say  
whoever dies at Magahar  
comes back a donkey.’

So much for your faith in Ram.

What’s Kashi Magahar? Barren ground,  
when Ram rules in your heart.

If you give up the ghost in Kashi  
is there some debt on the Lord’s part?

Or, perhaps, he leaves Banaras on order by the emperor. For whatever reasons he leaves Banaras, it may be apt to note that while the popular belief in Banaras —


\(^{158}\) Excerpt of a poem attributed to Malakadas (1574-1682) in Lorenzen 1997, p. 158.

\(^{159}\) Moksh, delivery from saṃsāra, the wheel of rebirth. When moksh is attained, the soul is not born on earth again. The final liberation. (‘Trance states’, in Walker 2005b, p. 520)


\(^{161}\) Kashi, is another name for Banaras. See note 6 on page 7.

\(^{162}\) Sabda 103 in Hess and Singh 1983, p. 76.

\(^{163}\) Keay 1996, p. 44.
that is, the belief painted in the color of Brahmanical views — was that Magahar was a dreadful place, it’s fair to assume that this was not the belief of the inhabitants of Magahar. And the inhabitants of Magahar was then, as they are today, Julahās. They are Muslim weavers and farmers. Just as Kabīr was. So, then, Magahar would not at all be that strange a place for Kabīr to spend his last days.

While Kabīr was alive, both Hindus and Muslims were eager to attack him. After his death, however, both groups wanted to claim Kabīr as their own. They started fighting over who would conduct the funeral rites. The Muslims wanted to bury him and the Hindus wanted to cremate him; each according to respective tradition.

Kabīr’s body was covered with a sheet. The Sants assembled around, sang and danced. When the sheet is removed, to everyone’s astonishment there are only two heaps of flowers left. Kabīr became immortal without leaving his body behind. The Hindus took one heap of flowers, which they cremated in Banāras; the Muslims took the other heap and buried it right there in Magahar.

2.2.2 Poems of Kabīr

The language of Kabīr

Though much can be debated about the various collections, as well as the various verses of Kabīr’s — if they are, indeed, Kabīr’s own words. Even the language of Kabīr’s is uncertain, though it probably was a form of hindui — the lingua franca of both low-caste Hindus and Muslim converts. The scholars are, however, in agreement that Kabīr himself was illiterate. He was, after all, of low caste as a weaver and there are no indications that he had gotten any training in reading or writing. The poems of Kabīr were probably handed down orally for at least a century before being written down. In the Bijak and the Ādi Granth Kabīr himself makes the following statement:

I touch not ink nor paper, nor take pen in my hand; of the greatness of the four Ages Kabīr has given instruction with his lips.

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166 For information on ‘Sants’, see note 65 on page 17.
I am not skilled in book knowledge, nor do I understand controversy.\footnote{Adi Granth, bilāvalu 2, from Keay 1996, p. 39.}

There is another, often quoted, poem that relates to the language of Kabîr — but perhaps only symbolically.\footnote{The poem is quoted in section 2.3.4 on page 40.} In the poem Kabîr claims his language to be that ‘of the East’. Vaudeville interprets this to mean that only those who know the symbolism of yoga can understand him.\footnote{Vaudeville 1993, p. 118. For more on the quote, Kabîr and yoga, see section 2.3.4 on page 40.}

**Kabîr-vāṇi** Literally ‘the words of Kabîr’, the Kabîr-vāṇi are split up in different collections. There are three main ones containing ‘poems’\footnote{Poems’ and ‘verses’ are called by different names in the different collections. There are pads, bhajans, ślokas, dohas, sākhīs and śabdas. Bhajans and pads are songs. A bhajan is a song of devotional love. (See Bhakti at section 2.1.3 on page 15.) Bhajans are often accompanied by drums and stringed instruments, and tend to be based on religious themes. Pad is an old form of song. Pads are usually based on a concise and meaningful saying. A Pād is also what a line in a verse is called. A ślok is a form of verse, based on four lines (pāds) each of which are eight syllables long. The sayings of Kabîr in the Ādi Granth are called ślokas. Sākhī means ‘testimony’, and is an equivalent of ślok. Dohas are simply couplets; pairs of lines which rhyme. (‘Singing’, in Walker 2005b, p. 403; ‘Prosody’, in Walker 2005b, pp. 245–246; ‘Hindi’, in Walker 2005a, p. 442; Vaudeville 1993, p. 133, note 4)} attributed to Kabîr. The Ādi Granth is the oldest of the three — it is also the only one that can be dated with some certainty. The Ādi Granth, as we know it today, was compiled in 1604. The second source are some Rajasthani manuscripts, of which the most important one is the Paîchvāṇi manuscript compiled by the Dadu Panth; it can be dated to the late seventeenth century.\footnote{Hess 1987b, pp. 111–112.} These two collections are called the ‘western tradition’, as there are some similarities between them as compared to the ‘eastern tradition’\footnote{Hess 1987b, p. 113; John Stratton Hawley, Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Times and Ours, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 269; Vaudeville 1993, p. 133.} that is, the Bijak. The Bijak, ‘seed’ of sacred treasures, is the collection of Kabîr’s poems used by the Kabîr Panthis in Banâras. The Bijak is probably\footnote{According to Hawley, the earliest existing manuscript of the Bijak was compiled as late as 1805. (Hawley 2005, p. 270)} also from the late seventeenth century, although the dating is more uncertain than in the case of the Paîchvāṇi.\footnote{Hess 1987b, pp. 111–113; Hawley 2005, p. 269; Vaudeville 1993, p. 132.}

A fourth collection might be mentioned, though it is not a part of what is usually referred to as Kabîr-vāṇi. This is the Fatehpur manuscript, and it was prepared as early as 1582. From the year 1661, the manuscript had been stored by the royal house of Amber and not been studied by scholars. Not until 1980, when it was exposed to public inspection, photographed, and thus made available for a wide audience. It includes poems of several poet-saints, both sagun and nirguna, and among them 15 texts attributed to

\footnote{Adi Granth, bilāvalu 2, from Keay 1996, p. 39.}
\footnote{The poem is quoted in section 2.3.4 on page 40.}
\footnote{Vaudeville 1993, p. 118. For more on the quote, Kabîr and yoga, see section 2.3.4 on page 40.}
\footnote{Poems’ and ‘verses’ are called by different names in the different collections. There are pads, bhajans, ślokas, dohas, sākhīs and śabdas. Bhajans and pads are songs. A bhajan is a song of devotional love. (See Bhakti at section 2.1.3 on page 15.) Bhajans are often accompanied by drums and stringed instruments, and tend to be based on religious themes. Pad is an old form of song. Pads are usually based on a concise and meaningful saying. A Pād is also what a line in a verse is called. A ślok is a form of verse, based on four lines (pāds) each of which are eight syllables long. The sayings of Kabîr in the Ādi Granth are called ślokas. Sākhī means ‘testimony’, and is an equivalent of ślok. Dohas are simply couplets; pairs of lines which rhyme. (‘Singing’, in Walker 2005b, p. 403; ‘Prosody’, in Walker 2005b, pp. 245–246; ‘Hindi’, in Walker 2005a, p. 442; Vaudeville 1993, p. 133, note 4)}
Kabir.\footnote{Hawley 2005, pp. 280-282.} The Fatehpur manuscript is mentioned later in the essay at section \footnote{Hawley 2005, pp. 269; Hess 1987, p. 117.} 2.3.6 on page 42.

**Different personalities** The personality of Kabir, as it is shown through the poems, differs from collection to collection. The Kabir in Adi Granth is someone who cares for an household; a quite warm figure, as is the Kabir found in the Pañchvānī. The western tradition seems, furthermore, to be filled with Bhakti\footnote{For more on bhakti, see section 2.1.3 on page 15.} in a greater extent than the eastern tradition.\footnote{Hawley 2005, p. 117.} Something that illustrates the latter, is that word ‘Bhakti’ is used only 19 times in the whole of the Bījak — but as many as 203 times in the Pañchvānī and in the Adi Granth there are 127 occurrences. The name of Kṛishṇa, a strong indicator of bhakti, is frequently used in the Pañchvānī (71 times); it’s common in the Adi Granth (33 times) — but is never used in the Bījak at all. Even ‘Rām’, which is the most common word for the divine in the Bījak, is only used therein 49 times, or in ab. 24% of the poems. In the Adi Granth ‘Bhakti’ is the most common key word, and ‘Ram’ — which is the second most common — is used as many as 112 times, or in ab. 50% of the poems. In the Pañchvānī ‘Ram’ is the most common key word, mentioned as many as 220 times, or in ab. 52% of the poems; Bhakti takes the second place.\footnote{Hess 1987a, p. 120, table 1; p. 121, table 2.} For an illustration of the numbers mentioned, see figure 1 on page 56.

There are other differences between the western and the eastern corpus as well, when it comes to the personality of Kabir. In the Pañchvānī we find a Kabir that laments the fact of death — something the persona found in the Bījak would never do.\footnote{Hess 1987, pp. 127–128.}

In the Bījak we find a Kabir that is composed and cool — but much more harsh, than the Kabir of the western collections. He confronts people directly and does it in an almost brutal way. It’s the Kabir of ‘rough rhetoric’, as Linda Hess has put it.\footnote{Hess 1987a.}

>`Qazi, what book are you lecturing on?  
Yak yak yak, day and night.  
You never had an original thought.\footnote{The first three lines of śabda 84, in Hess and Singh 1983, p. 69.}

They’re morons and mindless fools  
who don’t know Ram in every breath.  
[...]`
Pandits read Puranas, Vedas, Mullas learn Muhammeds faith. Kabir says, both go straight to hell if they don’t know Ram in every breath.

There’s a trend that poems in modern collections soften Kabir. The thorns in his sarcasm aren’t as sharp, and the criticism of an outer religiousness isn’t as aggressive. The critique is still there, as is the sarcasm, but no where near the dryness what we find in, say, the Bijak. Where the Kabir of ‘rough rhetoric’ can even be iconoclastic, and speaks directly against traditional practices, the ‘soft Kabir’ rather pleads the reader, or listener, to go beyond mere external observances. Modern bhajans typically focus on death and the transience of human life. According to Lorenzen, it isn’t even far fetched to say that for the average Hindi speaker today, Kabir is above all a poet of death. The topic of death is, however, running strong in the traditional Kabir-vani as well.

Despite the differences between the different collections of Kabir’s words, there is still far more similarities than differences. In Hess detailed comparison of the terms used, she calculates that the similarity between the Adi Granth and the Bijak, as well as the Paanchvani and the Bijak, is about 66%. The similarity between the Paanchvani and the Adi Granth is a bit higher, 88%. —One of the reasons why one can speak about an eastern, and a western, tradition.

In both traditions there are a large number of poems which deal with ‘delusions’. This is the attacks on Hindus, Muslims, on hypocrites and so on. It also includes ‘inner delusion’; the minds deception of the self as well as of others. Another common theme is death, as was mentioned above. A third theme that can be mentioned, is the ultraabami, the poem of ‘upside-down language’

**Ulaabami** Poems of ‘upside-down language’, or ultraabami, is a peculiarity of Kabir. The ultraabami poems are paradoxical statements, enigmas sometimes utilizing imagery from Tantric sources, sometimes from popular tradition and sometimes from what can
only be Kabir's own, vivid imagination.\textsuperscript{194}

They're hoping to hear the unstruck sound:
see the upside-down spectacle.
Just look at the spectacle, brother—
they've taken off for the void\textsuperscript{195}

Absurd, paradoxical and seemingly impenetrable poems are by no means something unique to Kabir — although they've become somewhat of his trademark. There is a long tradition of 'ulaṭbāṃśi-like' texts throughout India and, indeed, the world. Poems akin to Kabir's ułaṭbāṃśi are found in India from at least several thousand years before Kabir, but became common among Tantric cults about 1,000 years before his birth.\textsuperscript{196} They are also frequently found in Buddhism.\textsuperscript{197}

In trying to understand them, one can either try to understand the symbols used — by means of dictionaries written for this very purpose\textsuperscript{198} — or by trying to receive an understanding by means of intuition.\textsuperscript{199} Hess gives a description of the difficulties in interpreting these poems, that is worth quoting in length:

Attempts to explicate this poetry can easily go awry. If you ignore traditional lore, you're a fool. If you approach the material as a scholar, pulling long lists of meanings and equivalences out of your pocket, you're a fool. If you don't have an intimate, immediate understanding of the poem, you have nothing. If you report your personal interpretation, why should anyone believe you? Even in assuming that there is a hidden meaning to be dug out, you may be playing the fool: who is to say you aren't describing a naked emperor's clothes?

Upside-down language \textit{should} make you feel like a fool: that is part of its function.\textsuperscript{200}

Typical ułaṭbāṃśi poems turns roles, personalities and even the laws of nature upside-down. Yet the key to understanding is by no means as easy as reading it backwards, so to speak. Uḷṭā is here reversed — but in a way so that there is no way of telling what is normal. This can be seen to break language, indeed "the profane universe" itself\textsuperscript{201} it breaks what's expected and the reader, or listener, is rendered free to see something new. A 'new' universe is opened up for the adept. But for this freedom to be attained, one

\begin{itemize}
\item including black magic and other esoteric practices. Important features of Tantrism is sexuality, but also bhairav — terror or, in this context, the awe-inspiring. (‘Tantrism’, in Walker, pp. 482–486)
\item \textsuperscript{194}Hess \textsuperscript{1987}, p. 121.
\item \textsuperscript{195}Ramain Bar (Bijak), in Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, p. 147.
\item \textsuperscript{196}For some information on Tantrism, see note \textsuperscript{193} on the previous page.
\item \textsuperscript{197}Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, pp. 135, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{198}Judging by interviews Hess made with both pandits at the Kabir Math, as well as the mahant himself, it seems using dictionaries to make sense of Kabir is commonplace. (Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, p. 146)
\item \textsuperscript{199}Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, p. 135.
\item \textsuperscript{200}Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, p. 135, emphasis in original.
\item \textsuperscript{201}Mircea Eliade, in Hess \textsuperscript{1983}, p. 137.
\end{itemize}
cannot be dependent on dictionaries or similar ‘dead’ sources. In fact, ulaṭbāṃśī poems can be seen as ‘methods’, processes, or even initiations, rather than sources to knowledge in themselves. The point is not what is in the poem, but rather where you can go through it. Perhaps one might say that through the ulaṭbāṃśī — or in the state of mind of ulṭā, how the mind is before creation —, the adept can see the satguru, the true guru.

For examples of Kabīr’s ulaṭbāṃśī poems, see appendix B.2, pād 119 on page 63 and sākhī 1 on page 65.

2.3 Kabīr Described by Scholars

[Kabīr], though being a Muslim, was in truth not a Muslim. Though being a Hindu, he was not a Hindu. Though being a sadhu, he was not a sadhu. Though being a Vaisnava, he was not a Vaisnava. Though being a yogi, he was not a yogi. He was made different from all others and was sent from God.

Kabīr is a figure of paradox, mystique and legend. In the following section, efforts will be made to sift through some of the scholarly debate about him.

2.3.1 The Biography of Kabīr

Kabīr’s biography won’t be discussed from birth to death, but there is reason to mention some details. Much has already been gleaned when going through the legends. The discussion will be continued later on in the essay as well, but with a slightly different goal, in section 2.3.2 on the following page when searching for the dates of Kabīr. But first, a few tidbits about the life of Kabīr.

Kabīr’s birthplace Most say that Kabīr was born in Banāras, but a handful mention Magahar as, not only the place where he died, but also where he was born. It has also been claimed that Kabīr would have been born in Belhara, a village in the district

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204 Satguru, is the perfect guru or the true guru, identical to God. But specifically, in the context of Kabīr, it is invariably the Lord as found within oneself, the interiorized satguru. (Vaudeville 1987, pp. 33, 36; Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Radhasoami Revival of the Sant Tradition”, in: The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India, ed. by Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod, [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987], pp. 329–358, pp. 340–341)
207 Personal encounters in Banāras. In these cases, placing Kabīr’s birth at Magahar can probably be explained with people mixing it up with his place of death. However, it is also mentioned by Vaudeville. (Vaudeville 1993 pp. 57, 131)
Nevertheless, the tradition that he would have been born in Banaras is, by far, the strongest. And, thus, the most believable.

The families of Kabir  
Kabir was probably born into a Julahā family, Muslim weavers. Legend has it that his parents were called Nīru and Nīma; of them, we know nothing for certain. But of the Julahā it can be said that even in modern day, they are one of three main groups among the Indian Muslims. As noted in section 2.1.2 on page 14, many Hindus were attracted by the equality of the Muhammedan faith. It seems a great number of Hindu Shudra converted to Islam between the twelfth and fourteenth century — the same time around which Kabir was born.

As the reader may recall, the legend of Kabir’s birth would have it that Kabir would have been born by a Hindu woman. This is most probably a product of the hinduization of Kabir. There’s been a tendency to shape Kabir into an ideal Vaishnav saint. One who simply could not have been born Muslim. There is no way to be certain, but it is unlikely that the legend would have it right. We can somewhat safely assume he was indeed born into a Julahā family.

If Kabir had a wife and family of his own, is a somewhat controversial question — that is, controversial at least to those who wish to ‘hinduize’ Kabir. A true sādhu could not be a householder. But when has Kabir ever followed set rules? Although Kabir at times speak ill of family life, he nevertheless speaks at least as badly of ‘professional ascetics’; yogis, sādhus and the like. He did not take the vows of an ascetic. There are legends as well as poems of his that implies that he had a wife, even children, of his own. In fact, it even seems probable that he had several children. His wife is said to have been named Loī. Children that are mentioned, for instance in the Ādi Granth, are the sons Kamāl and Nihāl and the daughters Kamālī and Nihālī. There’s even a poem mentioning Dhanīa, a grand-daughter of Kabir’s.

2.3.2 The Dates of Kabir

There has been a lot of debate concerning the dates of Kabir. The traditional dates are the ones advocated by the Kabir Panthis; that Kabir was born 1398 and died 1518. Thus,
Kabir would have grown to be 120 years old — an unlikely age, considering that even today, the average lifespan of a man in India is 61 years. There are, however, plenty of other suggestions of more and less likely dates. Different groups have advocated different dates depending on what biographical data they would prefer Kabir’s life to best fit with.

Although the dates of Kabir is in a way a minor detail, not directly connected to the subject of this essay, the discussion concerning them is nevertheless taken in some length. It sheds a critical light on some of the legends, and other topics, covered elsewhere in the essay, are touched on as well — such as Kabir and his relation to Ramana.

Kabir and Ramana

For it to have been possible that Kabir and Ramana had met, they would obviously have had to been alive at somewhat the same time period. However, reliable dates concerning Ramana are as scarce as those of Kabir. The earliest date mentioned for the birth of Ramana is 1299, and the latest date of his death is 1470.

Many scholars doubt that Kabir was the disciple of Ramana. As Hawley points out, it’s a good story, but one that isn’t seen before the early eighteenth century. Before that, it was only noted by Ananta-das and Nabhadas that there was a relation between the two. Hawley has two objections to it: (i) the dates doesn’t fit; (ii) it’s too good a story, one that fits too well with the hinduization of Kabir. Vaudeville concurs with the second objection. Lorenzen is, however, of another opinion. He doesn’t see the dating as problematic at all, and gives greater weight to the fact that tradition is unanimous in claiming Kabir as Ramana’s disciple, than to the objection (ii). For the sake of the argument, the large fork between the dates of Ramana is provisionally accepted as a starting point. For Kabir to have met, let alone be the disciple of Ramana, he would have had to have been alive somewhere between 1299 and 1410.

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216 'Indien, Landsfakta', in Nationalencyklopedins Internettjänst.
218 Vaudeville 1993, pp. 54–55.
219 See section 2.2.1 on page 22 and note 107 on page 22.
220 See in section 2.2.1 on page 23.
221 See in section 2.2.1 on page 23.
222 More on Ramana in note 107 on page 22; legends mentioning him at section 2.2.1 on page 22.
224 Nabhadas (ca. 1625), also known as Nabhaji, was a contemporary of Tulsidas. Nabhadas compiled the Bhaktamal, a book containing hagiographies of bhaktas. The Bhaktamal is probably more known through Priyadas (ca. 1640) later commentary. (‘Hindi’, in Walker 2005a, p. 442)
226 Vaudeville 1993, p. 47.
Kabir and Guru Nanak  Guru Nanak is the Sikhs most important guru and their founder. Both the legends of the Sikhs and the Kabir Panthis would have it that Kabir and Nanak had met. Guru Nanak was born 1469 and died 1539 — which is quite late, in relation to the dates of Ramana. If one would have to choose between the two, dating Kabir in relation to Guru Nanak would be far less important. Virtually all scholars agree that it is highly improbable that the two met. One important reason, is that none of the early legends of Kabir mention such a meeting. It is only found in later Sikh or Kabirpanti texts, and then always in ways that have a clear purpose: to exalt either Nanak, in the Sikh texts, or Kabir, in the Kabirpanthi texts. Guru Nanak can play no role in the dating of Kabir.

Kabir and Sikander Lodi  Another important part of Kabir’s biography, is his encounters with the Muslim ruler Sikander Lodi, whose trials Kabir survived miraculously. Sikander Lodi reigned between the years 1488 and 1512, and possibly visited Banaras in 1495.

These dates fit quite well with those of Guru Nanak, so at least there’s not a third difficult case on our hands — if one would feel the need of adjusting the dates of Kabir to fit those of Guru Nanak, and accept those that accord with Sikander Lodi.

Closing in on a suggestion  A lifespan of Kabir’s, accepted by some, which would allow him to both have been a disciple of Ramana, have met Guru Nanak, and endured the trials of Sikander Lodi, is that he would have been born 1440 and died 1518. Vaudeville does not want to take a stand, and perhaps wisely so given the scarce evidence. According to her, there is a probability that he was born 1398 and died 1448, and we can at least provisionally accept that he lived during the first half of the fifteenth century. Hess gives the same dates, following Vaudeville. Flood follows suite, giving Hess as his source.

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229 Vaudeville 1993, p. 53; Keay 1996, p. 18 Also see section 2.2.1 on page 27.
231 Vaudeville 1993, p. 54; Lorenzen 1992 pp. 17–18. Keay, on the other hand, noting only the dates, deems it possible. However, he does not present any other evidence to the table, merely notes that the (probable) dates does not make it impossible for Kabir and Guru Nanak to have met. (Keay 1996, p. 28)
233 For the legends, see section 2.2.1 on page 23.
236 Vaudeville 1993, p. 53.
Lorenzen, on the other hand, would agree rather with the first date mentioned, or at least that the traditional date of Kabir’s death might be right. In his discussion, he considers the dates of Kabir in the light of ‘four tests’, one of which is the proposed meeting with Sikander Lodi that Vaudeville rejects. With the backing of Ananta-das’s Parachai, Lorenzen adds the relation of Kabir with another ruler into the discussion, namely Virasimha Baghel.

Kabir and Virasimha Baghel Lorenzen is alone in taking Virasimha Baghel into consideration; no one else mentions him. In his discussion Lorenzen shows that Baghel in fact was a historical person, and that we are able to discern approximate dates for him as well. Baghel is the king who plays a role in the legend of the pandā of Jagannath. The relation between Kabir and Baghel is similar to the possible synchronicity between Sikandar Lodi and Kabir. Even if the legends don’t hold true; even if Lodi didn’t torture Kabir the fact that they are mentioned together should not be discarded. Even if the legend of the pandā in Jagannath isn’t true, the possible synchronicity of Baghel shouldn’t be ignored.

Historically, there are ties between the Baghel dynasty and the Kabir Panth. Members of the ruling Baghel family of Rewa State were traditionally Kabir Panthis. There is legendary material that claims Virasimha Baghel, his son Virabhanu as well as king Ramasimha Baghel, would have been direct disciples of Kabir. In one source Ramasimha is said to be Virasimha Baghels grandson. Obviously it is deemed unlikely that this would be true, but the connections should not be discarded. There is a strong tradition that would have it that there is a synchronicity between Virasimha Baghel and Kabir.

Baghel died around the year of 1530, and is said to have been contemporary with Babur, who ruled between 1526 and 1530.

Lorenzen’s suggestion As was previously noted, both Vaudeville and Hess gives a relatively early date for Kabir. They believe that the traditional date of birth of Kabir’s might be right, but that he died around 1448 rather than the traditional date of 1518. Lorenzen, in contrast, would rather believe the traditional date of Kabir’s death, but would have him to have been born later than tradition would have it. Lorenzen arrives

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240 The four tests are (i) Counting genealogically back from Ananta-das; (ii) counting genealogically back from Nabha-das; (iii) Kabir having met Sikandar Lodi; (iv) Kabir having met Virasimha Bagel. (Lorenzen 1992, p. 14)
242 See section 2.2.1 on page 26.
244 Lorenzen 1992, pp. 15-16.
at the dates he proposes by taking into consideration (i) a geneological count back from Ananta-das and (ii) a similar count back from Nābhādās; (iii) the synchronicity between Kabīr and Lodi; (iv) the synchronicity between Kabīr and Baghel. Considering these dates, and accepting the traditional date of death, it seems likely that Kabīr would have been born around the middle of the fifteenth century, and died in 1518. This is very close to the dates 1440-1518 of Kabīr, proposed by Farquhar as well as Keay. As illustrated by figure 2 on page 57, there is much more that speaks for a later date, than an earlier date.

2.3.3 Kabīr — Hindu or Muslim?

There isn’t much that can be said to be clear-cut when it comes to Kabīr. There are different takes on what the religion of Kabīr was — was he born a Muslim and converted to Hinduism, or maybe the opposite, born Hindu and converted to Islam; or something else? As noted below, Dvivedi has suggested that Kabīr’s ancestors would have been Nāth yogis for centuries before converting, quite recently before the birth of Kabīr, to Islam.

It is clear that prior to Priyādas’s commentary of the Bhaktamāl none questioned the fact that he would have been born Muslim. It is only in later versions, including Kabīrpanthi texts, where Kabīr is said to have been born Brāhmin. One of the reasons Dvivedi suggested Kabīr, or rather his family, only recently would have converted to Islam is that Kabīr does not appear to be well versed in the Muhammedean faith. He seems a lot more comfortable using yogic terms, or some such.

Everything points to Kabīr having been born and brought up in a Muslim family — his proposed Hindu birth mother is most likely a product of later hinduization. But whether he at heart was Hindu, Muslim or something else, perhaps the following sections — especially 2.3.6 on page 42 — can shed some additional light on the kind ‘religiosity’ Kabīr might have leaned towards. The quotes of Kabīr at pages 42, 64 and 66 might be enlightening as well.

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245 Lorenzen 1992, p. 18; Keay 1996, p. 27; Vaudeville 1993, pp. 53-54.
247 See note 96 on page 20 and the first paragraphs of section 2.2.1 on page 21.
248 See section 2.2.1 on page 21.
250 Vaudeville 1993, p. 65.
2.3.4 Kabir — the Yogi

During the time when the survey was conducted in Banaras, the topic of Kabir naturally came up on more than one occasion. One of those was in meeting a yogi. When he heard the topic of the research, he lit up and exclaimed “Ah yes! Kabir! He was a great, great yogi. Very good yogi.” It seemed that all could relate to Kabir in some way. But perhaps there really is reason to celebrate Kabir as ‘a great, great yogi.’

The following sakhi in the Bijak has been interpreted by some to imply that Kabir would have an ‘eastern’ language.

\[ \text{My language is of the East—none understands me;} \]
\[ \text{He alone understands me who is from the farthest East.} \]

Vaudeville does not agree with this interpretation, but sees the sakhi rather as meaning that the only one who understands Kabir are those who live in the Eastern region. The key here is that ‘the Eastern region’ is not a geographical place, but something of spirit. To be of the east, to live in this ‘Eastern region’, is to be a yogi. Thus, only those well versed in the practice of yoga can really understand Kabir.

There are also legends that creates ties between Gorakhnath, one of the most famous Nath yogis, and Kabir. Although they can’t possibly have met — Gorakh having lived at least one hundred years before the earliest date of Kabir —, it is still likely that Kabir was born into a tradition of some kind of Nathism. Kabir makes fun of the Nath, as he does of so many, but nevertheless, he seems more familiar with the customs of the Nath than of the Muslim tradition. In his poems, he frequently mentions yogis in general, or the Naths in particular. Sometimes in a disdainful fashion; sometimes as if he’d be inclined to follow at least some steps of their path.

\[ \text{Go naked if you want,} \]
\[ \text{Put on animal skins.} \]
\[ \text{What does it matter till you see the inward Ram?} \]
\[ \text{If the union yogis seek} \]
\[ \text{Came from roaming about in the buff,} \]
\[ \text{every deer in the forest would be saved.} \]

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\( ^{251}\) Vaudeville 1993, p. 118. For more on the language of Kabir, see section 2.2.2 on page 29.
\( ^{252}\) Vaudeville 1993, p. 119.
\( ^{253}\) For information on the Naths, see section 2.1.5 on page 19. For more on the legends of Kabir and Gorakh, see section 2.2.1 on page 27.
\( ^{254}\) For more on Gorakh Nath, see section 2.1.5 on page 19. For more on the dates of Kabir, see section 2.3.2 on page 35.
\( ^{255}\) Vaudeville 1993, pp. 77–78; Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, pp. 44–45.
\( ^{256}\) Pad 174 from the Kabir Granthavali, in Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, p. 50. For the whole poem, see appendix B.2 on page 64.
In the poem above, Kabir ridicules specifically the Naths. But in the Kabir Parachai, it is mentioned that Kabir excels even Gorakh in the practice of yoga. And even still today, Kabir is viewed as very important by the Naths — second only to Gorakhnath himself, even.

Given the many references to the Naths is is clear that Kabir had an in-depth knowledge of them. Whether or not he really lived in ‘the Eastern region’ of yoga or not, he does seem to have some connections to it. And although Kabir could not have met Gorakh himself, he nonetheless could be in the tradition of Gorakh — that is, of the Naths.

Dr. Hajariprasad Dvivedi, a scholar of Kabir, has even claimed that Kabir’s ancestors since several centuries before Kabir, would have been yogis — probably Nath yogis. That his family would have converted to Islam as little as one generation before the birth of Kabir. This would explain why he was so well versed in areas of yoga, but seem to have so little knowledge of the ways of Islam.

2.3.5 Kabir — the Sufi

As mentioned in section 2.1.4 on page 17, by the time of Kabir Sufism had spread throughout the whole of Northern India and influenced culture in general — as a part of the amalgamatic culture that had been created in the meeting of Hinduism and Islam. Sufi imagery and terms where a part of the vocabulary of anyone living in North India at the time — and certainly by Kabir’s family, the Julah, the Muslim weavers, in Banaras.

As the reader recalls, it has been suggested that Kabir’s ancestors would have been yogis since a long time back, and recently converted to Islam. It was, in fact, among none other than the yogis, that the Sufis found their first acolytes — that is, people who converted into Islam. Furthermore, it can be added to the case in favor of Kabir being a Sufi, that he at times uses terminology borrowed from the Sufis.

On the other hand — everyone borrowed terms from the Sufis, during this period. And the Sufis themselves borrowed terms from others, such as, for instance, the yogis. There is simply not enough evidence to support that he would have been a Sufi. We don’t know that Kabir was a yogi, so the fact that Sufis gained followers from them does not really weigh in, as such.

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262 Vaudeville 1993, p. 117.
2.3.6 Apostle for Hindu-Muslim Unity — or a Thorn in Everyone’s Eye?

If I say one, it isn’t so.
If I say two, it’s slander.
Kabir has thought about it.
As it is,
so it is.  

The earliest Kabir we can know, the one found in the Fatehpur manuscript, can hardly be called ‘an apostle for Hindu-Muslim unity.’ In these, the oldest words attributed to Kabir that we know of, there is virtually no Islamic vocabulary used at all. This Kabir doesn’t mention Muslim — nor Hindu! — groups at all. A group mentioned, on the other hand, is the Naths.

Moreover, what we recognize as the familiar Kabir even in the Fatehpur manuscripts, is the tone of his voice. Here, too, are poems which are blunt, harsh, and repeatedly touching the topics of death and warning the reader of different kinds of delusion. Here, too, he praises Ram above all.

Rather than trying to harmonize the two communities of Hindu and Muslim, Kabir rejected both. He rejected the Vedas and the Koran; Muharram as well as Diwali; prayer as well as puja — all forms of institutionalized religion. Form was of no consequence for Kabir — or more specifically: outer form, rituals and scripture, was only in the way for the devotee. Content was all that mattered. That Ram was in the heart of the devotee.

I have one Niranjan and Allah, I don’t belong to the Hindus
or the Turks.
I don’t keep vows nor know about Muharram.
I keep in my memory Him who is the prime cause.
I do not do puja, nor do I spend time in namaz.
I offer homage to the formless one in my heart.
I don’t go on hajj, nor do puja at sacred bathing places.
I recognize the One, where is the second?

263Sakhı 120 (Bijak) in Hess and Singh 1983, p. 103.
265Hawley 2005, p. 290.
266It should also be mentioned, that speaking of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ as two communities is, to say the least, a generalization. Neither community is by any means homogeneous. There are probably groups within both communities, take the sufi and the bhaktas for example, that share more between respective group, than they do with other factions within the ‘community’.
267For information on puja, see note 113 on page 22
Kabir says: All error has fled, my mind is attached to the one Niranjan.

The Sants, the group of poet-saints, can however be seen as one of the few traditions that actually crossed the boundaries of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’. Furthermore, among the group called ‘poet-saints’, there were even people who weren’t Hindu at all, but Muslims. As was noted in the earlier section, Bhakti crossed boundaries of class and gender. The many similarities between Sufism and Bhakti made the one group accessible to the other.

For the Hindu and for the Turk there is but one Way which the Satguru has shown.

Says Kabir, O Sants, listen: what matter if one calls ‘Ram’ or ‘Khuda’?

2.4 Kabir Described by Yadav and Weavers in Banaras

2.4.1 Knowledge of Kabir

Of the twenty respondents, only five (25%) did not know Kabir. Although it may sound like 25% is a high percentage of people not knowing who he was, it should be noted that if people aren’t confident in their knowledge, they are naturally hesitant to participate in a survey like this. It is possible that they knew Kabir, albeit not enough to be willing to answer questions.

Another factor that might have been relevant, was that the group where the fewest respondents knew Kabir, was the Yadav women. The assistant during these interviews was Mr. Ashish Yadav — a man. This might have made them uncomfortable and less prone to be willing to answer. In contrast, interviewing the group of Muslim women, my assistant and interpreter was Ms. Mamta Yadav, and in this case the women did show as good a knowledge of Kabir as did the Muslim men.

As many as eight (53%) recited a doha or some such. This is quite interesting, given that dohas generally are in sanskrit — a language the respondents wouldn’t be able to speak.
to speak, as such, given their education. In general, only Brāhmins study sanskrit, and obviously no-one of the respondents were Brāhmins.

Everyone, except Fatur\textsuperscript{277} and Kha\textsuperscript{278} had at the most went to school up until tenth class; four had no formal education at all.\textsuperscript{279} This means that not only had they learnt a poem — a doha — by heart, they had learnt it by heart in a language they did not really know. In most cases they knew the doha well enough for them to be able to explain it when asked to do so by Mr. Ashish. More on this topic below at section 2.4.5 on page 46.

Stories or history about Kabir was told by even more respondents than recited poems.\textsuperscript{280} On the one hand, it isn’t surprising. It’s undoubtedly easier to remember tidbits from legends or history, than it is to remember a doha or some such well enough to be confident in reciting it. On the other hand, it still is a large number of respondents. 67\% in total gave some information about the life of Kabir. Some gave only a detail or two, others — like Mahavir Yadav\textsuperscript{281} — told almost the whole story about the birth of Kabir as well as of his death.

This might be interpreted to mean that virtually all who knew who Kabir was, knew quite a lot about him. The group that seemed to have the least knowledge of Kabir (three didn’t know him) was also the group with the least formal education; This was women among the group Yadav. In contrast, all but one among the women in the group weavers knew who Kabir was. Of the latter group, all but one person — of the ones who knew him — told a doha as well as some history or story about Kabir. The same group had the highest rate of education up until the ninth class.\textsuperscript{282}

The connection between knowledge of Kabir and education was further corroborated by the fact that several respondents specifically mentioned school. Many excused themselves for not knowing more of Kabir, or not being able to recite anything, by saying how long ago it was that they had attended school.\textsuperscript{283} One respondent explicitly said that whose who haven’t gone to school haven’t heard of Kabir either — and, conversely, that those who have had some kind of formal education know him.\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{277}Sadika Fatur, 38 years old, from Saket Nagar, Dec. 8, 2007, appendix D.4.5 on page 89.
\textsuperscript{278}Gani Kha, 26 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 26, 2007, appendix D.3.5 on page 85.
\textsuperscript{279}See figure 4 on page 58.
\textsuperscript{280}See figure 3 on page 58.
\textsuperscript{281}Transcription of the interview with Mahavir Yadav is found at appendix D.1.2 on page 70.
\textsuperscript{282}See figures 4 on page 58 and 3 on page 58.
\textsuperscript{283}Rajan Yadav, 35 years old, from Asi, Nov. 1, 2007, appendix D.1.5 on page 74; Muresh Yadav, 40 years old, from Asi, Nov. 1, 2007, appendix D.1.4 on page 73.
\textsuperscript{284}Mustaka Ahmad Ansari, 42 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 25, 2007, appendix D.3.3 on page 82.
2.4.2 The Religion of Kabīr

It was common among the respondents to hesitate before answering what the religion of Kabīr was. Some reasoned that he didn’t have a religion because he was a sadhu; some deduced that he was Muslim since he was raised by Julahā. Several mentioned him being born by Hindu but raised by Muslims. The overwhelming majority (80%), however, agreed on Kabīr being of all religions. Some said that he was of ‘no religion’.

This is a treat of Kabīr that can be found in every collection of poems, Eastern and Western, in the legends and in the picture painted by the respondents of the survey. It is simply difficult to pinpoint the religion of Kabīr. The best one can get at is to say that he was of all religions, or of none.

Based on the survey, it does not seem that either group can be said to claim him as their own — even though there is a tendency in both groups to maybe think of him a bit more like one of their own rather than of the other.

When asked how one would approach God, many said that, according to Kabīr, God is found in your heart or in everyone and everywhere. Out of the 14 respondents who answered this question, seven said you’d find God in your heart, two that God is in everyone and everywhere. Several (5) mentioned that you need to pray, and pray with your heart, to find God.

A noticeable difference between the two groups, was that only one Hindu (Mahavir Yadav) mentioned you’d find God in your heart — but as many as six Muslims did. This might be a result of the impact of the respondents respective religion. The common ground was that prayer is needed.

One respondent said that Kabīr didn’t really talk that much about God as such, but rather about guru. This might on the one hand mean any guru, and the tradition of guru parampara, or, on the other hand, it might be a reference to the satguru. It might be noted that this particular respondent was unique in that she had the highest education of all, having studied at Banaras Hindu University.

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285 Rajan Yadav 2007, appendix D.1.5 on page 74
286 Kha 2007, appendix D.3.5 on page 85
287 The respondents that said he was of no religion are, in the statistics included among those who said he was of all religions. By themselves, those who said he was of no religions were 2 (13%), both Hindu; one man and one woman. (Rajan Yadav 2007, appendix D.1.5 on page 74) Laxmi Yadav, 40 years old, from Nagwa, Nov. 15, 2007, appendix D.2.3 on page 76) Thus those who explicitly said he was of all religions, or gave respect to all religions, were 10 (67%).
288 Question number 6, see questionnaire at appendix C on page 67
289 Results illustrated in figure 8 on page 60
290 Appendix D.4.5 on page 85 Fatur 2007
291 For information on ‘parampara’, see note 66 on page 17
292 For information on ‘satguru’, see note 204 on page 34
2.4.3 Kabir’s Personality

In contrast to the question of the religion of Kabir, it was a lot easier to see almost somewhat of a consensus regarding Kabir’s personality. To sum it up, he was, quite simply, a nice man (अच्छा अदम्म). He gave respect to all, troubled none and no one gave him any trouble. Many mentioned that Kabir was a sadhu; most said he taught others.

The image of Kabir that appears, is far from the harsh critic found in the Bijak. The man in front of us is rather a sage; a saint who lived in peace and preached the same. This is not the Kabir that is a thorn in every person of hollow religiosity, but rather someone who harmonize groups; someone who speaks for both groups not against them. Perhaps one could say, that this is much closer to the Kabir in legends rather than poems.

2.4.4 A relevant figure for today

Only one from the Muslim group and two from the Hindu group did not think that Kabir was a relevant figure today. In other words, of the respondents that knew Kabir, as many as 80% thought that he was relevant 293.

When asked what we can learn from Kabir, many responded either that one could learn how to live a good life, or how one could live in peace. The latter mainly meaning how people can live in peace with each other, as brothers and sisters. How people from different religions can live together without disturbing one and another 294.

The Hindu group seemed more inclined to talk about how to live a good life — as in a proper life; a morally good life. Whereas the Muslim group mentioned living in peace more frequently.

2.4.5 Quoting Kabir

The respondents were quite able to recite a text or two of Kabir’s off hand. Two of the Yadav men, and one of the women, told a bhajan 295. One of the Muslim men told a bhajan, and three of the women. None of the bhajans mentioned by the Hindus were quoted by the Muslims, nor vice versa 296.

Two bhajans were mentioned twice, ‘Kajur tree’ by two Hindus 297 and ‘Guru and

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293 Illustrated in figure 6 on page 59.
294 Illustrated in figure 7 on page 60.
295 In addition to the two respondents among the Hindu men that quoted a doha or bhajan, there were in two cases quotations made by bystanders. These are not included in the statistics. (Mahavir Yadav, 43 years old, from Nagwa, Oct. 31, 2007; S. M. Yadav 2007)
296 Illustrated in figure 3 on page 58.
297 Appendix D.1.3 on page 71, S. M. Yadav 2007, appendix D.2.4 on page 78. Mira Yadav, 45 years old, from Asi, Nov. 15, 2007. It must, however, be noted that in the case of S. M. Yadav, the poem was not quoted by Mayaram himself, but by a bystander.
2 Research

2.4 Kabir Described by Yadav and Weavers in Banaras

Govind standing’ by two Muslims

The message conveyed by pretty much every bhajan or doha quoted, is how to live a good life. You should do your work well and honestly; you should not compare yourself to others nor be overly curious. You should not fight amongst each other. In short, the quotes cited by the respondents where very much in tune with what they said could be learned from Kabir (see 2.4.4 on the preceding page).

2.4.6 Differences Between the Two Groups

Though there were some variances between the groups, there were by far more similarities than differences. One from the group of Yadavs reported Kabir to have been Hindu; one from the group of Weavers, said he was Muslim. In the latter group, there was somewhat more focus on the fact that Kabir was raised in a Muslim family — but, nevertheless, they too said he was of all religions (or none). Likewise, it was stressed more in the group of Yadav that Kabir had been born in a Hindu family — but, again, most agreed that he was of all religions (or none).

One respondent from the group of Julahä gave some interesting answers concerning the influence Kabir had on the community of weavers. Din stated that before Kabir, his community only made clothes. It was none other than Kabir who taught them how to create different designs, how to make sarees and such. This is something that has not been mentioned by other scholars nor by other respondents. It seems to give Kabir a much more fundamental role — and one associated especially to the Julahä of Banaras. Kabir appears as something like ‘the original Weaver’.

That the Muslim group would put more emphasis on that one can learn from Kabir how to co-exist in peace, might stem from them being a minority. They would probably feel a greater need for such a teaching.

2.4.7 Additional Interviews

As a complement to the actual survey, the questions was also asked of a class of students. The respondents here were 11 students, all girls between the age of 14 to 15, from the Muslim school of Zintul Islam Girls’ School in the area of Reori Talab, Banaras. It is important to keep in mind that the students had had notice well in advance that I would come. In other words, they had time to prepare. And of course the teacher would want

\[298\] Nurjaha, 30 years old, from Saket Nagar, Dec. 8, 2007, Appendix D.4.3 on page 88;

\[299\] Ansaru Din, 34 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 25, 2007.

\[300\] See appendix C on page 67.

\[301\] Transcription found in appendix D.5.1 on page 89.

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the students to perform well. In that sense, one might read the results as that of the ideal class — or at least something of that kind.

Indeed, the results were ‘ideal’. In this one interview, the students covered virtually every area that the previous respondents had touched on — combined. Their answers might be shorter, but that is only natural as the interview was conducted in group, and not in a more comfortable discussion. They knew dates; they knew details.

What the students put much emphasis on, is that Kabîr did not believe in any religions — and in all; he believed all religions were one. He wanted there to be ‘brotherhood’ between religions.

Concerning his personality, they only had one thing to say: “He enjoyed life.” This reply might perhaps also be interpreted into meaning that he lived a good life. In any case, it is similar to the other respondents perception of Kabîr as a ‘nice man’ — but very dissimilar to the Kabîr found in, for instance, the Bijak.

During the visit to Zintul Islam Girls’ School, a few short questions was also asked of Mohammad Toha, Professor in Sociology and an important figure in the administrative work of the school. When asked what they teach of Kabîr, he said that what they teach is what they’re told to do in the central plan. There wasn’t any said goals to be attained with this, or some such, it was simply something to be done. “Whatever is in the book, we have to teach.” Kabîr enters the curriculum from class 6-7 and onwards, under the heading of Hindi studies.

3 Discussion

3.1 Conclusions

A well known figure Most of the respondents knew of Kabîr — and perhaps there were reasons other than ignorance behind the lack of answers from some of the others as well. Regardless, the search for Kabîr in Banâras was often greeted with smiles and perhaps a story or comment about Kabîr. As noted in the introductory words to section 2.3.4 on page 40, a yogi exclaimed that Kabîr was a great yogi; a respondent saw him as Banâras first great weaver — but the list is longer than that. Many seem to have a personal relation to Kabîr; or, in other words, many seem to be able to take Kabîr and relate on a personal level to him.

Personality As was noted in the previous section, the personality of Kabîr, as it seemed to appear in the interviews, was quite unlike the man of ‘rough rhetoric’ that can be found

\footnote{Toha 2007 Appendix D.5.2 on page 91.}
in the Bījak. As the Bījak is the main text of the Kabīrpanthis, and the seat of the panth is in Banāras, where the interviews were conducted, one could have assumed that more of the Bījak would shine through. Some of the respondents even originally came from the area where the Panth is — but still they, also, kept to the ‘sage-like’ image.

Perhaps this is a indicator that he primarily is not known directly through his poems. Rather, he is known through legends and plausibly through the function he is put to in the educational system. Of the latter there is unfortunately not much that can be said at this point, as it was not a part of the study. But it seems that Kabīr would be used as somewhat of a bridgebuilder between communities. A bridgebuilder specifically between Hindus and Muslims, but also between men and women in general.

The personality of Kabīr in this image that has been painted by the respondents might also be seen as a result of the hinduization of Kabīr, as it fits quite well with the picture of what a Vaishnav saint should be like — which is the mold into which Kabīr has been tried to make fit.

Claimed by none A question that was framed in the introduction, was if Kabīr seemed to be claimed by one or both of the two religions Islam and Hinduism. Judging by the answers of the respondents, neither was the case. Neither the group of Muslims nor the group of Hindus, generally speaking, claimed Kabīr for their own. There was the odd voice that expressed a different opinion, but overall it was clear that the image that arose of the religiosity of Kabīr, was that he was of all religions, or of none.

‘Muslim image’ — ‘Hindu image’ By now it has been repeatedly stated, but as another group of questions that was initially framed concerned the specific Muslim and Hindu view, respectively, of Kabīr, it will be said once more. The picture of Kabīr as painted by the respondents of both groups harmonized well with each other. In other words, there really was no ‘Muslim’ or ‘Hindu’ image to speak of. The image of Kabīr was one and the same in both groups, generally speaking.

There were, it should be noted, other opinions as well — one claiming Kabīr to be Hindu; two claiming him to be Muslim. But, again, they were the minority.

Some other interesting variations did turn up as well — such as the claim by Mr. Ansaru Din, that Kabīr was the one that taught the Julāhās to design sarees and such. That before Kabīr, the weavers of Banāras only made clothes but nothing more. Today, Banāras is famous for its weaves — the sarees in particular. All thanks to Kabīr. This is something that might be explored further, in a secondary study. Is this a widely spread view or an opinion that was unique to Mr. Din?

303 Appendix D.3.2 on page 81 Din 2007
3.1.1 Suggestions for Further Studies

Limits of this survey  The survey was not large enough to come to any real conclusions. There is much more to uncover — even only in what the image of Kabîr is among the lay people. A much larger group of respondents should be interviewed for a reasonably clear picture to appear. Furthermore, the interviews should be more in-depth.

There is some question as to whether the group of Julâhâ were more knowledgeable of Kabîr than the average Muslim would have — given that Kabîr, after all, was Julâhâ himself. It seems only natural that stories of him would cling longer in groups who are mentioned themselves in the stories. In a possible follow-up study, the results form the Muslim group should be corroborated by at least interviewing a number of people from another group of the same religion. Or, perhaps, only people who aren’t weavers themselves should be included in the survey.

Untouched topics  The field of Kabîr-studies is a large one indeed, and though more might have been touched on in this essay than necessary, still more remain unmentioned. One that should be given more attention is the use of Kabîr.

Clearly, he has been put to use by a large number of groups — spanning from early, Christian missionaries\footnote{For more on Christianity and Kabîr — really, an astonishing read —, see Vaudeville 1993, pp. 23–24.} to the nation-state of India of today. There is much work that could be done here. Just to mention something, there seems to be a political group in Banâaras who tries to convey their message by street theater — and they solely use Kabîr in their pieces. Kabîr is also used frequently in general political speeches — both by left- and right wing groups, interestingly enough. Both these phenomena would be very interesting to study.\footnote{Personal discussion with Siddhart Singh, professor at the department of Pali and Buddhist studies at Banaras Hindu University.}

The possibility of an emergent view of Kabîr as ‘the original Weaver’ was mentioned above. It would be interesting to see if this is indeed the case. Is there a widespread belief that it was Kabîr who taught the Julâhâs of Banâaras the art of weaving their beautiful sarees? Is that something that has begun to be added to the mythology of Kabîr?

Studies should also be done on the material used in school, as well as the guidelines concerning Kabîr that has been set up by the state; the national plan, as Mr. Toha put it.\footnote{Appendix D.5.2 on page 91, Toha 2007.} Looking at the answers the students at Zintul Muslim Girls’ School gave, it seems quite clear that the emphasis concerning Kabîr is put on areas which lifts up unity between Islam and Hinduism, as well as justice for the ‘lower classes’.

There is a large body of literature concerning Kabîr. Much has been written especially...
— and naturally enough — about the poetry of Kabīr. Much has been said about the influence of Kabīr. But there is still more to discover.
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Bari, Abdul, 35 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 25, 2007.
Din, Ansaru, 34 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 25, 2007.
Kabis, Abdul, 30 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 26, 2007.
Kha, Gani, 26 years old, from Shivala, Nov. 26, 2007.

Additional interviews

11 students, all girls between the age of 14 and 15, from the muslim *Zintul Islam Girls’ School* in the area of Reori Talab, Dec. 12, 2007.
Toha, Mohammad, Professor of Sociology and a leading figure in the Zintul Islam Girls’ School, Reori Talab, Dec. 12, 2007.
Appendices

A Figures

Figure 1: Usage of terms in the Kabir-vani

![Bar chart showing usage of terms in Kabir-vani between Bijak, Panchvani, and Adi Granth. The chart includes bars for Bhakti, Krishna, and Ram.]
Figure 2: Timeline, possible dates of Kabir
A Figures

Figure 3: Respondents knowledge about Kabir

Figure 4: Education of the respondents
Figure 5: The religion of Kabir

The Religion of Kabir

- He was of all religions
- He was Hindu
- He was Muslim

Figure 6: Kabir is relevant today

Kabir is relevant today
A Figures

Figure 7: What can we learn from Kabir?

Figure 8: Where can one find God acc. to Kabir?
B Quotes

B.1 List of quotes in text

Quotes of Kabir are found in the text at the following locations:

- Section 2.1.3 on page 16
- Section 2.1.4 on page 18
- Section 2.1.4 on page 19
- Section 2.2.1 on page 24
- Section 2.2.1 on page 26
- Section 2.2.1 on page 28
- Section 2.2.2 on page 29
- Section 2.2.2 on page 31
- Section 2.2.2 on page 31
- Section 2.2.2 on page 33
- Section 2.3.4 on page 40
- Section 2.3.4 on page 40
- Section 2.3.6 on page 42
- Section 2.3.6 on page 42
- Section 2.3.6 on page 43

B.2 Additional quotes

The following are quotes mentioned in the text, but which are too long or otherwise cumbersome to include in-text.
“Moko kahāṁ ḍhūṅḍhe re bande”

Where will you find me, my friend?
I’m always near.

Not in idols or sacred spas,
not in secret places,
I’m not in temples or mosques,
not in KāŚī or KailāŚ.

I’m not in prayer or penance,
not in vows or fasts.
I don’t stay in yoga, in rites,
or renunciation.

Look and you’ll find me as quick
as the wink of an eye.
Says Kabīr: Listen, sadhu.
I’m found in faith.

“Man tūṁ phūlā phire”

O mind, you merrily strut your stuff,
But who in this world can you find to trust?

The mother says: This is my son.
The sister says: He is my hero.
The brother says: He is my rock.
The woman says: He is my man.

His mother cries for the rest of her life.
His sister cries for less than a year.
His woman cries for a couple of weeks
Then goes to live with someone else.

The shroud the begged was four yards long.
The pyre was lite, just like at Holi.
The bones burned up like firewood.
The hair burned up like dried grass.
The body that once was gold is burnt
And no one wants to come near to it now.

\[307\] Lorenzen 1997, p. 213.
The women of the house begin to cry,
Wandering all over, searching in vain.
Says Kabir: Listen, brother sadhu.
Give up the hopes you hold for the world.

Pad 119 (Kabir Granthavali)

Pundit, so well-read, go ask God
who his teacher is
and who he’s taught.
He alone knows what shape he has
and he keeps it to himself,
alone.
Child of a childless woman,
a fatherless son,
someone without feet who climbs trees,
A soldier without weaponry,
no elephant, no horse,
charging into battle with no sword,
A sprout without a seed,
a tree without a trunk,
blossoms on a tree without a branch,
A woman without beauty,
a scent without a flower,
a tank filled to the top without water,
A temple without a god,
worship without leaves,
a lazy bee that has no wings.
You have to be a hero to reach that highest state;
the rest, like insects,
burn like moths in the flame—
A flame without a lamp,
a lamp without a flame,
an unsounded sound that sounds without end.
Those who comprehend it,
let them comprehend.

\textsuperscript{308}Lorenzen [1997] pp. 210–211.
Kabir has gone off into God.\footnote{Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, p. 57.}

Pad 174 (Kabir Granthāvali)

Go naked if you want,
Put on animal skins.
   What does it matter till you see the inward Ram?
If the union yogis seek
Came form roaming about in the buff,
   every deer in the forest would be saved.
If shaving your head
Spelled spiritual success,
   heaven would be filled with sheep.
And brother, if holding back your seed
Earned you a place in paradise,
   eunuchs would be the first to arrive.

Kabir says: Listen brother,
Without the name of Ram
   who has ever won the spirit’s prize.\footnote{Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, p. 50.}

Pad 182 (Kabir Granthāvali)

If case was what the Creator had in mind,
   why wasn’t anyone born
with Siva’s three-lined sign?
If you’re a Brahmin,
   from a Brahmin woman born,
why didn’t you come out some special way?
And if you’re a Muslim,
   from a Muslim woman born,
why weren’t you circumcised inside?

Says Kabir: No one is lowly born.
The only lowly are those
   who never talk of Ram.\footnote{Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988, p. 54.}
Sākhī 1 (Bījak)

Seekers, bhakti came from the Guru.
A woman bore two men —
get this, pandits and sages.
A rock broke open, out came the Ganges —
on all sides, water, water.
Two mountaints hit the water,
stream entered wave.
A fly flew up, perched in a tree,
and spoke one word.
A female fly without a male,
she swelled up without water.
One woman ate up all the men,
now I alone remain.
Kabir says, if you understand this,
you’re guru, I’m disciple.

Śabda 10 (Bījak)

Saints, I’ve seen both ways.
Hindus and Muslims don’t want discipline,
they want tasty food.
The Hindu keeps the eleventh-day fast
eating chestnuts and milk.
He curbs his grain but not his brain
and breaks his fast with meat.
The Turk prays daily, fasts once a year,
and crows “God! God!” like a cock.
What heaven is reserved for people
who kill chickens in the dark?
For kindness and compassion
they’ve cast out all desire.
One kills with a chop, one lets the blood drop,
in both houses burns the same fire.
Turks and Hindus have one way,
the guru’s made it clear.

\[\text{Hess } 1987b, \text{ p. 132. Also see Hess } 1987b, \text{ p. 132 for a short discussion on this sākhī.}\]
Don’t say Ram, don’t say Khuda.  
So says Kabir\footnote{Hess and Singh 1983, p. 46.}

**Śabda 75 (Bījak)**

*It’s a heavy confusion.*  
Veda, Koran, holiness, hell, woman, man,  
a clay pot shot with air and sperm…  
When the pot falls apart, what do you call it?  
Numskull! You’ve missed the point.  
It’s all one skin and bone, one piss and shit,  
one blood, one meat.  
From one drop, a universe.  
Who’s Brahmin? Who’s Shudra?  
Brahma rajas, Shiva tams, Vishnu sattva…  
Kabir says, plunge into Ram!  
*There: No Hindu. No Turk*\footnote{Hess and Singh 1983, p. 67.}
C Questionnaire

C.1 English

(1) Who was Kabir?

(2) What was the dharm\textsuperscript{315} of Kabir?

(3) Did Kabir have an impact on the relations between Hindus and Muslims?
   (3.1) If so, what kind of impact?
   (3.2) If so, is that change still in effect // does he still have that kind of effect?
   (3.3) In what manner did he try to bring about a change?

(4) What were Kabir’s views on the social-structure?

(5) Did Kabir have an impact on the social structure?

(6) According to Kabir, how and where should one try to find God?

(7) Have you been to (a) Lahartara\textsuperscript{316} (b) Kabir Math\textsuperscript{317}\?

(8) Have you attended a Kabir bhajan?

(9) Do you have a favourite bhajan, doha or sloka of Kabir?
   (9.1) If so, which is it?
   (9.2) If so, could you describe what you like about it?

(10) In what way(s) is Kabir relevant or important today?

(11) What can we learn from him?

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\textsuperscript{315}For more on ‘dharm’, see \textsuperscript{2.1.1} on page 13
\textsuperscript{316}Lahartara is the lake where the Brâhmin widow left Kabir, according to legend. (See section \textsuperscript{2.2.1} on page 21)
\textsuperscript{317}Math, is a place similar to a monastery. A place of seclusion, where people who are dedicated to a religious figure or cause, live. Important centres of religious education. (‘Education’, in Walker \textsuperscript{2005a} p. 322) Kabir Math, in Banâras, is the religious center of Kabirpanthis.
C.2 हिंदी

(1) कबीर कब उन्हें तहएक

(2) कबीर कबस चहूँमरह लगे तहएक

(3) क्या हृदनदित म अगर मउसमलालभाव म के ए सहननवमंदमो म के पारः उनके के वच्चरी म कह परअवहावक तहाक

(3.1) जबदंक हाँ तो उनहोने कब प्रसन्न परअवहाववंत किया के

(3.2) क्या जब वह उनके परअवहाववंत किया के केवल का हाँ परअवहाववंत हुआ?

(3.3) अनहोने कबस तबवहावक का तबगहलावक लाए कई कोषसंक्षेपक कहके अबर कब प्रसन्न प्रसन्न

(4) उसब सादोयाँब कई सामाजिकक्रम नयनवासतंत्र के बारे म उनके के क्या विद्यारुत तहएक

(5) क्या सामाजिकक्रम नयनवासतंत्र परअवहावके के परअवहाववंत किया तहाक

(6) कबीरवरुच के महतात्त्विक मञ्चनुक मयाक की ईदसवारसक को कबहाव दक्षविघ्नरुप जाहिरतएक

(7) क्या आप अबवहाव लोहारअतिरंग वालए कबीरबरुच मुखहार म अगए हाँ अर के?

(8) क्या आपने कबवहाव कबवहार अर के वहविजयनो म म अर म वहागो लढ़या हुआक?

(9) क्या आपका कोई मजलनपनस्तनवाद बहवजजनाब दोहा या क्षासलोकक हुआक?

(9.1) जबदंक हाँ तो कोनसाक

(9.2) लयवहार यी हाँडैज अपको हाँडैज दोहा प्रसन्नवस्तनवाद हाँडैज इस अर म अर क्या वालउ हाँडैज जो अपको अच्छहार लगाइएक

(10) जब के सादननव वहहार म हाँ कबवहारके के वच्चरी म कई क्या परासवागीता हुआ?

(11) उनके परअवहाववंत के वच्चरी म साए हाँम क्या सईकह साक्षतए हुआक?
D Interviews, transcribed

D.1 Yadav, men

D.1.1 Ramjanm Yadav

Ramjanm Yadav, 35 years old, from Assi. No education. (31 October 2007)

(1) Kabîrdâs was a nice person. He wrote nice poems too. He used to give nice knowledge to everyone.

(2) [Ramjanm] thinks for a long time before answering.] He was a Hindu, but according to Kabîr [himself], all religions were the same. Kabîrdâs gave the same respect to Hindu and Muslim. Kabîrdâs was Hindu.

(3) All religions were the same for Kabîrdâs. Since he was a sādhu, people came to him for knowledge. Both Hindu and Muslim came. [Kabîrdâs] saw no difference between them. He got in no trouble, caused no trouble.

(4) For Kabîr’s time, he was giving his knowledge to everyone. And he was religious, gave religious teaching.

(5) Kabîr changed [it], with his speech. He wanted Hindu and Muslim to become nice friends. Everyone is still running to his words, following what he said. Kabîrdâs was trying for everyone to become [a] nice person. And [for] everyone to come together, to be empowered together. That was what he was trying to change. All can become a success. [Kabîr] was trying to totally change what was different between Hindu and Muslim.

(6) By doing bhajan you can get to God, according to Kabîr. And you need to clean your soul. And never speak bad to people. And never cause pain to other people. The above is what Kabîr said how you can get to God.

(7) Yes, I’ve been to Lahartara, a few times. Not to Kabîr Maṭh.

(8) I’ve attended bhajan, a few times; not many. At Lahartara.

(9) There are many dohas of Kabîr, but I don’t remember. [Thinks a while more.] There is one doha, [tells it in Sanskrit:]  

\[318\]My interpreter quite consistently translated the word अचबहा / अचचहे with nice. अचबहा is a multipurpose word, and although it might sometime sound better to use the word ‘good’, or some such, instead of ‘nice’, I have retained my interpreters choice of words.
[Could you explain it in simple words?] Someone is begging at a home, but people are not giving anything; going to kick him, they say “We have nothing, go away from here.” Those who kick out the beggar, they will die. [Comment from interpreter: Not die, but be a beggar himself; a bigger beggar than the other one.] Is already dead.

(9.1) —

(9.2) I like it because in this doha there is thutness.

(10) At the present Kabêrdâs has much respect and is very important. Because at this time no one can do as Kabêr did – to be all truthful. Still people think he is important and give him respect because they think he was truthful.

(11) We got thutness, and we change if we follow his way. How we treat people, how we live [will change]. And in heart we get truth.

D.1.2 Mahavir Yadav

Mahavir Yadav, 43, from Nagwa. Went to school up until tenth class. (31 October 2007)

(1) Kabêr was giving respect to all religions as the same. And we are all human, so we are all the same. There is nothing that is different. There is not one, but many thoughts of what the religion of Kabêr was, but Niru and Nîma were Julahâ. They gave him food and other things during his childhood. Someone had thrown him [i.e. the baby Kabêr], because she was feeling shy because of society, what they would think of the child Kabêrdâs.

Niru and Nîma managed his childhood. Kabêr had no jati. No one knew who threw him, so how could one know to which jati he belonged to.

When Kabêrdâs was dead, there was a sàdhlu who covered the body [of Kabêr] with clothes. Then after when they dig, there was two flowers, [but] no body. The sàdhlu gave one flower to the Muslims, one flower to the Hindus.

Difficult to know if he was Hindu or Muslim. But he was a sàdhlu.

(2) —

\footnote{In Hindi, words get different endings depending on the gender of the subject, as in this case, or the object. Because of that, we know that this ‘someone’ was of female gender, even though Mahavir didn’t give any more details.}
According to Kabir, you can find God in your heart, in your body. You don’t have to go anywhere else. Because God is inside every human.

(7) No, neither.

(8) I don’t remember any. [A friend, who has been standing by listening, gives a doha in Sanskrit:]

बहोराजो कोजअनन्त मएष चअलान जो कोजा सो अपनो मउजहए बहोराजो कोई

[Could you explain it in simpler words?] Many people want to find out other peoples bad habits. Before finding out other bad people, see inside how bad you are. So when you realize how bad you are, you don’t want to know how bad others are.

(9) —

(9.1) —

(9.2) [The respondent is again Mahavir Yadav.] I like this doha because in this doha reality has been written. Everyone should not think about what other are thinking and doing. They should only think about themselves. Because people are always thinking of others. But if they’d stop, the world would be very much nicer.

(10) —

(11) —

D.1.3 Sri Mayaram Yadav

Sri Mayaram Yadav, 65 years old, from Nagwa. Went to school up until tenth class. (31 October 2007)

The respondent did not like the situation very much, and got more uncomfortable as the interview proceeded, and more people gathered around. It was not possible to retain

320Even though it wasn’t Mahavir, but a friend of his, that recited the doha, it is included here, since Mahavir was the one who continued to answer (i.e. 9.2 below).
the structure of the interview; questions answered were 1, 9.2, and 7. In that order. After which Sri Mayaram Yadav grew too impatient to continue, and left the interview.

(1) Kabīr’s mother’s name was Urvāsī. She got a boon from Surya\textsuperscript{321} that if she’d take a bath before sunrise the pregnancy would be no more. But she took the bath after [sunrise]. She had Kabīr. But she was shy of what people would think. She left Kabīr at the pond.

Some Brāhmin people got him, and they managed his life, brought him up at their home. Thus Kabīrdaś became very nice.

Kabīrdaś became a disciple to Kina Ram Bhagwa temple.

Guru Gorakhnāth and Kabīr had a competition. Kabīrdaś became a tom-cat\textsuperscript{322} Gorakhnāth became a fish. [Kabīrdaś ] became a fish because they can stay in water. Gorakhnāth became a fish because they stay in the water. The competition was, that if Kabīr could find Gorakhnāth. As a tom-cat, he caught Gorakh Nath off the water. The second competition. Gorakhnāth threw a rope in the air and climbed on it to the sky. Kabīrdaś climbed up to the sky in plain air. Gorakhnāth took a trishul\textsuperscript{323} and sat on it in the air. Kabīrdaś sat in midair [without any support]. Kabīrdaś was always the best in competitions.

(2) —

(3) —

(4) —

(5) —

(6) —

(7) I’ve been to Lahartara a million times. [Mayaram left.]

(8) —

(9) —

(9.1) —

(9.2) [Doha told (in Sanskrit) by a bystander, at an earlier stage of the interview:]

\textsuperscript{321}Surya is the sun.
\textsuperscript{322}Bilar
\textsuperscript{323}Trishul’, a trident. The weapon Lord Shiva wields. (‘Weapons’, in Walker 2005b p. 591)
If you are very tall, there isn’t any meaning as a tree of Kajur. There is no possibility of shadow and when the fruit falls, it falls far form the trunk. Too tall, no shadow, no fruit. Very difficult to help people. So if people were rich but you are not going to give money or help poor people; there is no meaning with this. What you are, you are for yourself and not for others. Dohas meaning is to be nice to everyone.

(10) —

(11) —

D.1.4 Muresh Yadav

Muresh Yadav, 40, from Assi. (1 November 2007)

(1) —

(2) Kabīrdaś was Hindu.

(3) No.

(4) —

(5) —

(6) According to Kabīr, you have to do prachand puja paṭ

(7) No.

(8) Yes, at Tulsi Ghat.\footnote{My interpreter doubts that there has been a Kabīr bhajan at Tulsi ghāṭ. Perhaps it was at one of the nearby ghāts; maybe at Assi ghāṭ.}

(9) I don’t remember.

(10) —

(11) —
D.1.5 Rajan Yadav

Rajan Yadav, 35, from Assi. Went to school up until ninth class. (1 November 2007)

(1) Kabir was a sadhu; [he] had no specific religion nor caste. He was a great saint.

(2) If you check by name, you can find Kabir in [peoples names from] both Hindu and Muslim religion. But I’m thinking he was Hindu.

(3) At Kabir’s time he was not giving speeches of which was the right way. He was not saying there was any difference between Hindus and Muslims. Both Hindus and Muslims came to hear what Kabirdas had to say.

(4) At this time, if you’re going to see what is in local area how the world is ran [it is different from then]. At Kabir’s time, he had no trouble with Hindu and Muslim. And [thus] he had no effect on [the relations between] Hindu and Muslim. He was managing his own time.

Who is going to become sadhu or sant does not think of religion or cast, and [they] don’t have any effect on those things. And they don’t see any difference between cast. For example, now we are here, but we can go to the mosque and there’s no difference [between Hindu and Muslim], all we [e.g. Hindus] have to do is to be clean. Today there are many Hindu’s that go to a mosque to pray. If you go to a mosque there are maulvis, but they aren’t going to stop you if you’re clean. But if you’re unclean, then they can stop you.

Same for Kabirdas when he lived here. He saw no difference. Everyone could come. Kabirdas was doing his duty, uncaring of who was Hindu, who was Muslim.

Sant Kabir was a poet too.

**वापर्णाए जच ममवल्य वहिगै पानई**

Blanket is going to rain and water is going to become wet. [Can you explain what it means?] I have no idea about the poem, but this was how Kabirdas was. Few words but much meaning. Many meanings in each word. Kabirdas, in one word, there are many sentences. Like ‘going’ can mean people going, like money going – it depends on what he wanted to explain.

(5) Many people got effect from his words, and still people are following [his words, his way].

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[325] Sant’, see note 65 on page 17
[326] This seem to be a ullaṭbāṃṣi poem, for more on ullaṭbāṃṣi poems, or poems in the Upside-down language, see section 2.2.2 on page 32.
(6) It’s difficult to say how to find God according to Kabir. If you’re going to try by praying hard, you can see God within everyone; in my body, in your body. So everyone has different opinion and thinking. People see God in the way they believe. Same for Mirabai. Wherever Mirabai looks, she’s going to see Krishna. And she could find Krishna in beggars and in kings too. For her beggar and king was the same, because she was looking at Krishna, not beggar or king. She was finding Mohan in everyone – they weren’t really [Mohan], except for her. And people were calling her crazy, but she wasn’t crazy, she was a great lover.

(7) No.

(8) —

(9) I left school some 30 years ago. The lesson on Kabir was in like the fourth or fifth year of education. I don’t even remember which year I got married in. It’s very difficult to remember a poem because it isn’t used [often]. If you don’t practice, you don’t remember it. You can write a letter, like ‘a’, but few people can write serial bai, from a to z, because of lack of practice. But this does not mean that they don’t know the alphabet.

(10) At this time many people give much respect to Kabirdas, but not everyone. It depends on the person, who believes in these things. The same with religion as with family. Some give much nice respect to the father and some don’t. Around 90% know of Kabir, because around 90% have education. You know from your youth, because in school there’s a lesson on Kabir. Even those that don’t know, don’t know what Kabir did and all his poems and such, even they know something. Everyone knows a little.

(11) If you follow Kabir’s opinion you can become a nice person. Because he was a nice person so you can become a nice person too. Take Kalidas for example. He was the [biggest fool] from the start. He went to to cut a branch. Sat on the same branch he was cutting. But he followed Kabirdas, and Kalidas too became a nice person.

D.2 Yadav, women

D.2.1 Préma Yadav

Préma Yadav, 32, from Nagwa. Went to school up until ninth class. (13 November 2007)

(1) I don’t know.
D.2.2 Kausalya Yadav


(1) I don’t know. Though I’ve heard of him. [From where?] I don’t know. [What have you heard of him?] I’ve only heard the name of Kabirdas.

D.2.3 Laxmi Yadav

Laxmi Yadav, 40, from Nagwa. Went to school up until tenth class. (15 November 2007)

(1) He was a sadhu, a Sufi Sant.

(2) Kabirdas had no cast, no religion. He gave the same respect to all. He got life in Brahmin family. Some Muslim family, Julaha, had managed his childhood. When Kabirdas became older, he gave knowledge to Hindu and Muslim and Shudra too. He saw no difference in religions or cast. So the Hindu thought he wasn’t nice, since he gave knowledge to Muslims too. And the Muslims thought likewise. Kabir used to make them fight with his speeches. From both religions there were people who didn’t like him, [who] caused trouble. So he had to move from Lahartara to Kabir Chaura. ‘Chaura’ comes from ‘chabutra’, meaning platform. He continued to to teach at Kabir Chaura.

(3) Yes, for both religions. For all religions. I’ve had history until class ten, which is why I remember so much. Both religions is the same according to Kabir.

(3.1) —

(3.2) —

(3.3) Kabirdas had no education. He was not educated and he was not forwarding anyone elses words. He was always following his own opinion, his own words. And when he was giving speeches, he was not supporting Hindus or Muslims, regardless of the audience. Still they follow his opinion. Still his branch is running many places. If you visit his place in guru punnima there is a big mela. It is in July. They celebrate his birthday in July.

He tried to change, watching not only Hindu and Muslim, but all religions. And tried to say to everyone that all of us are a gift from God, like sons of God. We have to do our work and keep distance from fighting.

327 For Sufism, see section 2.1.4 on page 17 for Sants, see section 2.1.3 on page 17
(4) For that time, Hindu and Muslim were fighting but both people from both religions came to visit him. And Ravidas became his disciple. Kabir was bigger than Ravidas. Ravidas went to Tulsidas, asked “Can I become disciple.” Tulsidas replied “You’re Chamar, I’m Brähmin, so this is not possible.” Then Kabir came early morning and slept in the stairs on the riverside. Tulsidas came and stepped on Kabir; exclaimed “Ram Ram Ram.” From that time on, Kabir was the disciple of Tulsidas.  

(5) Yes.

(6) According to Kabir you can find God everywhere. You have to work; [you] can’t just leave [work] for temple. When you have time, work and pray. Do both. Kabir was a Julāhā as a child so he had to work. He was working and praying too.

(7) I’ve been many times to Lahartara, Kabir’s birthplace. Kabir got life in Lahartara. His mother was a widow, she had a baby but didn’t know how she’d manage his life. She saw a lotus flower, many lotus flowers, in the pond. [She] put Kabir on a lotus flower and left. From pond husband and wife Nīru and Nima Julāhā took him. And he spent his childhood in Lahartara Mat. And he made Kabir Mat when he had to move, as a place to stay. He made only [the] chabutra, but now there’s a mat. It grew slowly, slowly. There’s also a Kabir ghāṭ, near Gadwa ghāṭ. They haven’t finished it it, it’s a katcha ghāṭ.  

If you can go inside Kabir Mat, there’s a tunnel, a silver bed. There are four jinda samadhi Before, when my grandmother lived, she saw one do this. I grew up behind Kabir Mat. If you want to go there, I can come along and you can get any books you want.

(8) I have attended bhajan, since I grew up there I’ve attended many times. If I had a book with Kabir bhajans I would give, but I don’t have. I will go with you to Kabir Mat and you can get any book you want, take any picture you want.

(9) Right now I can’t remember any doha or bhajan.

(9.1) [Mrs. Yadav recites a song] […] [Can you explain what it means?] I can’t explain the meaning.

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328 It is obviously the legend of Kabir’s initiation by Rāmānanda that Laxmi is telling — even though she has confused Rāmānanda by Tulsidas. (For the legend, see section 2.2.1 on page 21.)

329 Katcha ghāṭ, an unfinished ghāṭ; a clay-ghāṭ with no stairs.

330 People that have willingly been buried alive, sitting in a pose of prayer. (According to Mr. Ashish.)

331 According to Mr. Ashish it is a modern song, which contains information on the biography of Kabir, as he supposedly had sung himself while weaving.
(9.2) In this doha you can see his life. You can find what he has done in his life. This is the story of his life, like a sheat [ie. told in a simple way]. When he was weaving, he was singing this doha.

(10) Today there are many people who follow Kabîrdâs. And at the villageside you will find more Sufi Sants. In [the] whole country you can find his people, who follow his words. From Lahartara to Delhi, Mumbai [and] Calcutta, you can find his branch.

(11) Still if you go to Kabîr Math they are doing all work following Kabîr’s rule. There is farmer who grow vegetables, they do all work by themselves. So people are following his rule. They are accepting his rule and are going to follow it. From his opinion we learn not to ever speak any bad words to anyone. And try not to follow the things, like money and such. What God has given you, you should be happy with.

D.2.4 Mîra Yadav

Mîra Yadav, 45, from Assi. Went to school up until tenth class. (15 November 2007)

(1) He was (a) Sant.

(2) He was giving respect to, accepting, both religions. [Kabîrdâs was] born in Hindu family, but Muslim Julâhâ managed his childhood.

(3) Yes.

(3.1) He was teaching. Both Hindu and Muslim were affected by his dohas and bhajans.

(3.2) Yes, they still follow. At this time there is cassette too. People didn’t use to know, but thanks to this cassette, many do. Both Hindu and Muslim used to play that cassette.

(3.3) He was trying to teach hindu and Muslim by doha in Satsang. By doha and bhajan he tried to bring them all together.

(4) At that time, there was a woman condition which was not nice. People were feeling caste and religious differences too. They were separate. Kabîr tried to get them all together.

(5) Yes.

According to my assistant, the cassette to which Mîra Yadav refers to, Kabîr Amritvani, was made some two and a half years ago. It came to be quite popular.
(6) According to Kabir you have to do worship very deeply. (वहअगउन मए लडन होना)

(7) No [not to Lahartara]. Yes[, to Kabir Chaura].

(8) I’ve attended a few times, at Kabir Chaura. There is one platform and everyone use to make bhajan there at that platform.

(9) बबड़ा हुआ तो कहा हुआ जोहारसा पएड़ा कहाजयरा पह मजहब्र लो
जहावा नजहब्र म ललाघ लागए अति दजर
Kajurutree, long like a coconut-tree. Too high. When compared to any other tree, it’s higher than all, but of no use to anyone. No one can get any profit. Few leaves; no shadow; and fruit fall far away too. Respect is dependent on the work not on age or some such.

I used to know many. I like many, and know a few. But now at this time I’m only remembering one.

(9.1) —

(9.2) The meaning of the doha is like real life. It’s reality. When you experience it in life, you know it to be true. What he has written is the real things. Sometimes local people speak these words.

(10) Many people have chosen Kabir das as their guru mantra. Some chose Glava ghāt baba, some Kabir das. It depends on the people, on their family. Still people go to Kabir das place to visit him as their guru mantra. In my grandmothers family, they have chosen Kabir das as their guru mantra.

(11) Some people, when they feel unwell, they go visit Kabir Math, and wish. And their problems use to go away if they kept visiting Kabir Math.

For Kabir’s thinking, Hindu and Muslim belong is the same religion. That’s why he made doha too. And in Kabir doha is very important and every doha has a meaning. And Kabir and Rahim [are] both poets [who] have poems. In schoolbooks there’s a story about Kabir and Rahim, and poems too.

साई इततना दजजरक तामए उदजमक साहम्यये महाल वहई मऊकहा ना रअहऊत्र सागहऊ वहई मऊकहा ना जारऊ
Someone is missing to God. Saying I don’t need many things. Only what I need to live and so I can give the beggar that might come asking.
D.2.5 Parmīra Yadav

Parmīra Yadav, 28, from Nagwa. No education. (17 November 2007)

(1) I don’t really care. I have too much to do. Food to make, home to take care of. I don’t have time to care about these things.

D.3 Muslim weavers, men

D.3.1 Abdul Bari

Abdul Bari, 35, from Shivala. Went to school until he was 16, stopped at grade four. (25 November 2007)

(1) I don’t know. Those who have read his story can tell. […] He was a singer. He was a good person. He had good company, never had any problem with anyone.

(2) He was alltogether, both Hindu and Muslim. And he was born in Muslim family.

(3) Both religions got effect from his words.

(3.1) For that time he was managing both. When festivals or sadness in family, he used to attend both Hindu and Muslim.

(3.2) Yes, still people give him the same respect as at that time.

(3.3) He was managing both religions, and he had a good thinking. That is why both Hindu and Muslim got effect from his words.

(4) —

(5) —

(6) In your heart there is God. So if you look into your heart, you can find God. If you ask with your heart how to find God, you will find God.

(7) No [not to Lahartara]; Yes, I’ve been to Kabīr Chaura.

(8) No

(9) No

(10) For today also he has as much respect as when he was living.

(11) If you’re going to compare Kabīr’s time and today, there is much difference between religion and all things. What we can learn from him is to be all together [for all of us to be together].

80
D.3.2 Ansaru Din

Ansaru Din, 34, from Shivala. No education, “but my kids used to go to school.” (25 November 2007)

(1) He was a Muslim, but childhood [was] managed in Hindu family. His family had the weaving business; he was a weaver. He used to make saree, the design to sarees. And write poems too, while he was doing his work. From Kabīr we have gotten this family. Before we only made clothes. Kabīr taught designing, sarees and things. And business improved much.

(2) He was giving respect to both religions. But he was brought up in Muslim country, by a Hindu family. When he died, Hindu said he was hindu, so he should burn, but Muslim said he was Muslim, and wanted to bury. There were no [body], only two flowers, rose. Hindu took one; Muslims took the other.

(3) No

(4) —

(5) There was no problem between Hindus and Muslims because Kabīr was managing both. They were as brothers.

(6) For me, I used to go to mosque, because I’m Muslim. It depends on the person, to which religion one belongs. If you’re Hindu, go to temple to find God; and if you’re Muslim, you should find God in mosque.

(7) No [not to Lahartara]; No [not to Kabīr Matḥ ]. But I’ve been to Kabīr hospital [which is in Kabīr Chaura].

(8) I haven’t been to Kabīr Chaura so how could I have attended bhajan? How could I know when there’s program, I’m always busy.

(9) —

(10) Still people follow. Follow his words.

(11) In all [of] India we have learned how to stay all together from Kabīr. Still we are managing same things. Same conditions, same business. There is no difference in business between caste. And all business belong to someone.
D.3.3 Mustaka Ahmad Ansari

Mustaka Ahmad Ansari, 42, from Shivala. Attended school until fifth class. “I was very poor when I was a student. Used to go to attend class, then start weaving with father. I started weaving as 10 years old. Stopped school around 12 years old.” (25 November 2007)

(1) We know Kabīrdāś as a poet. He was a quite popular poet.

(2) I don’t know if he was born in a Hindu or Muslim family. Nobody has figured that out. But he was giving respect for both religions. Kabīrdāś was born, but was a face of God. [He was like a God.] His childhood was managed by a bundhkar family. Kabīrdāś was staying in temple and mosque too. So hard to say to which religion he was born.

(3) Hindu and Muslim religions both were affected by him. He gave nice speeches to both [groups], so both Hindu and Muslim were affected by his words. People got effect from his words; that’s why he became this popular.

(3.1) —

(3.2) —

(3.3) He used to call people and give a speech for them. And that time all weren’t following, but was opposing. Kabīrdāś tried to teach them too. And he tried [to get] people to stop hīṁsā and become ahiṁsā. He was telling them by his voice, his poems.

(4) According to that time, he wrote poems, dohas, about the situation of that time. He wanted to change the situation.

कालः कारणः सो जी कारणः जिः कारणः जी कारणः सो अव ।

333 A family of weavers.

334 Hīṁsā, means killing; the meaning of ahiṁsā is non-harming or non-injury. It is one of the highest virtues in Hindu ethics. Taken to its peak, ahiṁsā is to live one’s life in such a way that no harm — physical or psychological — comes to any living being. (“Ahiṁsā”, in Walker 2005a, p. 16)

335 According to my assistant, the following is a part of the poem, but not quoted by Mr. Ansari:

अव कारणः सो अबहाई

336 Translation: What you’re going to do tomorrow, do today, and what you’re going to do today, do right now.
If you’re going to see today as well you can see there’s no difference between Hindu and Muslim, but somebody still feel a difference between Hindu and Muslim. So when Kabir was here, there was also people who felt there was difference, and people who felt there weren’t. And those who felt there wasn’t went to hear his speeches. And he was all the time speaking true and he was supporting the right things. So people were affected. And today too there are people who live the right way, who supports him too. So people weren’t supporting one religion or the other, but that which was true.

There is much difference between giving a speach and to do. Kabir was not only giving speeches, but was doing true too.

(5) Kabir was going to change what was bad and weak in society. Kabirdas was weaving. That job is really truthful work because what you earn is 100 percent true, because in this job there is no bad things, cheating and such.

If you want more information about Kabirdas you should go to Lahartara.

(6) You can get [to God] form inside, from heart. But we need to be clean first. We can get *ishvar khuda*, everyone, if we are clean. From inside what is bad, we have to take out; then we can get anything. Great people like Kabirdas, and so on, had to fight first, to become clean. And then they became great persons. People always wish something, so first you have to stop wishing all these tings. You have to see inside, to be clean, and then you can get to God form the inside. You don’t have to go somewhere.

(7) I’ve been to Lahartara, many times, because I have the saree business. To give some things and to get some things. I’ve been in Kabir Mathi too. A lot of changes there. I saw last time, and the time before that, a lot of changes.

(8) Sometimes when we gossip at the riverside, someone can start singing bhajan or doha. I’ve done that. [How many times?] The purpose was not to do bhajan. The discussion

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337 The meaning, according to my assistant: If you’re going to be in sad way, you’re not going to earn money (because Laksmi can’t come there. If you’re going to think a lot you’re going to loose your cleverness. If you are sad at all times, you are going to become weak. Mr Ansari did not explain the poem at this point – however he later talked about the meaning of it. See below, answering question (9.2).

goes from matter to matter. But if [the topic of] Kabir comes up, some might sing a doha or bhajan, and some others join in. If someone comes, they join. But at this time it’s not possible, because everything is changing, so no one is talking about those things.

For this time there aren’t many people interested in Kabir. They want to talk about Bollywood movies, about cricket. But some [young] people, they are interested, so they talk, and want to know more.

(9) You can get doha or bhajan from my uncle. [Gives the second doha, from above, again.] The meaning of this doha is that Kabir wanted to tell people to try anyhow, to be happy.

(9.1) —

(9.2) In this poem you can see all things true. You can see whole life in this poem. That’s why I like this poem a lot.

(10) We have already gotten effected from Kabirdas. But if you’re going to see how fast the world is running so one day it will stop. One day people will forget Kabirdas, Ravidas, everyone. Government give gifts to different people but we don’t get [any]. If you have the contacts but otherwise not possible. Kabirdas has his limit. You can find him only in books. So if you’re going to limit him there’s no meaning. Like Ganga Mahotsava. You cannot start a program like that in Kabirdas name. But in any program you can talk about Kabirdas. Not two hours, but ten minutes. Someone can give speech, because many people [that attend the concert] are beggars and have not been to school, and so haven’t heard of Kabirdas. So those people will also be there because it’s a festival so [then] they can get knowledge of Kabirdas too.

(11) You can see the way, get it, from Kabirdas. For that, in foreign country, everyone has a lot of facility. In foreign country they talk about person too, they give knowledge. If you compare with foreign country we need to get more information, knowledge. Then young people will know about Kabir. If you give limit for one person, then what can you learn? Otherwise they’re just going to read from the book that he was a nice person who always used to speak true and then in next class stop [thinking of/remembering him]. It is not in Lohta [e.g. Lahartara], where he was born, but in Varanasi, [that] the government can make some program about him. So we can attend the program and learn about Kabirdas. And we can give knowledge to the next generation about Kabirdas too.


84
D.3.4 Abdul Kabis

Abdul Kabis, 30, from Shivala. Went to school until the tenth class. (26 November 2007)

(1) I don’t know.

(2) —

(3) —

(4) —

(5) —

(6) —

(7) I’ve been to Lahartara, but not to Kabīrda’s birthplace.

(8) No.

(9) No.

(10) —

(11) —

D.3.5 Gani Kha

Gani Kha, 26, from Shivala. Graduated from class 12 + 3. (26 November 2007)

(1) Kabīrda was a writer. He write dohas and poetry.

(2) Nīru and Nīma were Julāhā. They managed his childhood. They were of course Muslim, so he was Muslim.

(3) —

(4) I don’t have that kind of deep knowledge about Kabīrda.

(5) —

(6) Inside your heart.

(7) No [not to either].

(8) No.
D Interviews, transcribed

D.4 Muslim weavers, women

D.4.1 Nazbul

Nazbul, 60, from Saket Nagar. Education up to fifth class. (8 December 2007)

(1) Kabir was a Mahant \[341\] a Sant. In reality, he belonged to a very lowest cast. He was doing ceremony and became popular. So then he became mahant.

(2) [He was] born in Lahur [near Punjab]. I have no idea in which religion he was born. […] Born in Hindu family. But used to always walk around the city, especially at Dashashwamedha ghāt at the riverside.

He was Hindu.

(3) —

(4) Both Hindu and Muslim got effect from his words. When Hindu and Muslim became his disciples, they were following his words.

(5) At that time [there was] no problem. Everyone was following his words. His story and thinking everyone was liking so there wasn’t ever any trouble.

(6) According to Kabir you can find God in your heart. Kabir knew that we can get to God from inside his body. That’s why he was always talking from body to God. Like Hanuman, who knew Ram and Sita to be in his heart.

(7) I have heard he was born in Lahartara, but I haven’t been there. Been in Kabir Chaura, seen Kabir Maṭh from outside, but have not been inside.

\[340\] In 1680, near Asī, at Ganga he (i.e. Tulsidas) left his body.

\[341\] ‘Mahant’, the head of a monastary or maṭh. (‘Hierophant’, in Walker \[2005a\], p. 438) For ‘maṭh’, see note \[317\] on page \[67\].
(8) No.

(9) No idea. When I was a student I knew, but now I don’t.

(10) There’s still people who love him, who follow his words.

(11) We can learn from him doha and how to do worship [bhakti].

D.4.2 Johara Begam

Johara Begam, 35, from Saket Nagar. No education (8 December 2007)

(1) He was born in Lahartara in Kashi. Got left in Hindu family but Muslim family took care of him. Family put him into lake and threw away. Found and taken home by Muslim family.

(2) He was giving same respect to both religions because he knew he was born in Hindu family but spent childhood in Muslim family.

(3) From Kabir’s words Hindu and Muslim disciples became as brothers. [There was] no fighting each other.

(4) —

(5) —

(6) Go to temple or mosque, depending on which religion you belong to. If you try to find God with your heart you will get it anywhere. At your home too. You’re going to do the lighting in the temple and in the mosque, if you light and try with heart you can get [it] at home too.

(7) [I have] been to Lahartara because my brother used to visit there. Been in Kabir Chaura but not with the purpose to see Kabir Math.

(8) No.

(9) No.

(10) The same respect Kabir had he has now too. For example God and Goddess is not going to change and we all are going to continue to give them respect. Same with Kabirdas too for us.

(11) को लालड़कारई तहञगञाडा गञञ दहो गोःगोः मञञकञञ रञञगञञ रञञदहञञा

Kabir tried so that Hindu and Muslim wouldn’t fight but stay together always.
D.4.3 Nurjaha

Nurjaha, 30, from Saket Nagar. Went to school up to class eight. (8 December 2007)

(1) [Kabīr] was a poet. Born in Lahartara in 1398, died in 1518. [He was] born in Hindu family but childhood managed by Julāhā family.

(2) Giving same respect to both religions.

(3) Muslim got more effect, if you’re going to compare with Hindus.

(4) At that time [he] was giving same respect to both religions, to both younger and older, younger and older cast.

(5) For his thinking it was nice if people got effected.

(6) According to Kabīr anywhere if you do ceremony with heart you can get to God. You don’t need to be in temple or mosque.

(7) Lahartara, yes. I used to live there. I saw his birthplace and a samadhi. I don’t know whose. People staying there used to do ceremony at [the] samadhi.

(8) No.

(9) गुरु और गोविंद दोनों हैं, क्या करने वाले क्यों हैं? लाहौर क्याकहैं, ताजा भूमि में आई आर्द्र गुरु।

Guru and Govind are both standing; what to do, whose feet to touch. Many thanks guru for telling me.

The preceptor saw way what to do at this condition. Felt attracted to guru because he had actually helped at that time. So he touched feet of preceptor, not God.

(10) From his opinion we try to change our life.

(11) He was Julāhā, he was weaving. We can learn good things from him. He tried to walk around in city and give people speech. From his speech they were affected and were changed. We can learn from him good things. We don’t use to do bad words.

D.4.4 Monima

Monima, 40, from Saket Nagar. Went to school up until fifth class. (8 December 2007)

(1) I don’t know him.
D.4.5 Sadika Fatur

Sadika Fatur, 38, from Saket Nagar. Studied BSI at Banaras Hindu University. (8 December 2007)

(1) He was poet.

(2) Giving same respect to both religions.

(3) Yes, in our thinking.

(4) He didn’t see any difference between Hindu and Muslim,

(5) Yes, that time people got affected. Because people are using one doha for educating children. Otherwise no, they wouldn’t.

(6) According to Kabir– I have no idea where to find God. But Kabir has given more respect to guru than to God, if you’re going to compare.

(7) No, not to either.

(8) I haven’t been to Lahartara or to Kabir Math, so how could I have attended? If I had been to Lahartara or Kabir Math, then I could have attended.

(9) गुरु और गोविंद दोदहूँ काव्याएँ पहापहें लागू पांव बंजर दह अरु गुरु अपनें गोविंद दह बन आतारुँ

Guru and God are both standing. The duty of the disciple is to touch the feet of the guru first, not the God. According to this poem, guru used to get more respect than God.

(10) —

(11) We can learn from Kabir to give respect to guru. It is true, according to this poem, that we use to give respect first to guru, but at this time only a few people are following this. Because too many things are changing. [It is] almost impossible to do it. Only a few people are following.

D.5 Additional interviews

D.5.1 11 students

11 students, all girls, between the age of 14 to 15 (class 9 and 10), from the Muslim school Zintul Islam Girls’ School in the area of Reori Talab, Banaras. Class 9-10 is when they study the “main class of Kabir.” (12 December 2007)
(1) Kabir was a poet and a social reformer. He didn’t believe in superstition. Kabir
wanted unity. He was a very simple man.

(2) Kabir didn’t believe in any religion. [Into what family was he born?] Kabir was born
in Hindu family. Niru and Nimu, a Muslim couple, adopted him. Near Lahartara
lake.

Kabir was a illiterate person. He believed in simple life and high thinking.

(3) He didn’t believe in any religion.

(4) Kabir believed all religions are one. There should be brotherhood between the reli-
gions. He did not believe in superstitions.

He did not believe in cast-system. [He thought that] all are equal in front of God.

(5) —

(6) In the soul of men; of human beings.

Where are you trying to find me? I’m inside, not in kaba not in masjid not in
Kailash.

Where to find God is not in Qaba not Kailash, but in persons heart.

(7) No [no-one had been to either place].

(8) No.

Try to use those words other people can be happy (and not cursed) [from]. When
you speak anything rather than being rude you should speak so softly even you feel
better (after speaking the words).

(9) Whatever could be done tomorrow do it today.

(10) —

342 This is probably a fragment of the bhajan “Moko kaham dhundhe re bande”, see appendix B.2 on
page 62.
(11) Don’t leave things for later; do it today.

(12) [Anything you’d like to add?] You only learn [about Kabir] in school, from books.

He had two children: Kamal and Kamali.

Kabir was a weaver. The name of his wife was Loi.

He was born 1398, died 1518 120 years old.

A Brähmin widow gets Kabir due to a blessing of swami Ramananda.

His language was pankhmi kijni and sadukari, a mix.

He died in Magahar 1518. He was found in Lahartara.

Kabir could not read or write; his students wrote.

Books of Kabir are Sikhi Sabhd and Ramaini.

The language of Kabir was vija. Very mixed up language.

Kabir is a Muslim name.

He died in Magahar.

(13) [Could you say something about his personality?] He enjoyed life.

D.5.2 Mohammad Toha

Mohammad Toha, an important figure of the administration of the Zintul Muslim Girls’ School. (12 December 2007)

Why do you teach (about) Kabir? We follow the central plan, a part of the national program.

What is the goal of teaching (about) Kabir? [What do you wish to achieve with it?] Whatever is in the book, we have to teach.

Kabir comes with Hindi studies, which is from class 6-7 and onwards.

The language of Kabir was the spoken language of the time.