ABSTRACT

THE QUEST OF KABIR: CONSCIENCE AS POETRY IN PRE-MODERN INDIA

Kumar, Rajeev

PhD First Year Student in Civilization Studies,

Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey

Email: rajeev.kumar@gmail.com

Mobile: +905531719546

Pre-modern India, also known as the Bhakti period, is a crucial period in Indian history. Kabir, as an oral poet, is the most remarkable figure of this period. Many scholars, particularly historians, have differed in assessing Kabir within a broader historical context. However, no scholar has tried yet to study Kabir from the civilization perspective. That is what I intend to do in this thesis and while doing so, I argue that Kabir's poetry represents a civilizational metaphor or conscience that was achieved in pre modern India. To support my argument, I invoke Marshall G S Hodgson’s projection of Islamicate highlighting three figures in unity in the Indian subcontinent: Kabir, Akbar, and Abu’l Fazl. Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, and his advisor-cum-historian Abu’l Fazl developed *Sulh-e Kul* (Universal peace). Both intended to establish *Muhabbate-e Kul* (Universal love) that had inspired Kabir. Thus, *Muhabbate-e Kul* embodies and justifies Hodgson’s neologism of Islamicate civilization. I also use the concept ‘asabiyya’ of Ibn Khaldun as a sense of belonging and expand it as an oceanic feeling which I call love. My use of ‘asabiyya’ is different from how scholars have generally understood it in explaining political phenomena from a sociological perspective. I use it as the development of a feeling that is to be expanded as an oceanic feeling or *ilm- al-umran*. Humanity should move towards this oceanic feeling as it is the ultimate goal. I would also like to call it ‘nirvana’. However, in this study, the asabiyya, the beginning of cultural unification expanding as an oceanic feeling, is the conscience developed in people living together throughout history. The Bhakti period is the manifestation of the oceanic feeling, which developed the conscience in society so that Hindu, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and others could live together.

This thesis is my humble attempt to reread world history by overcoming the crucial analytical gap that omits the Bhakti legacy. By focusing on Kabir’s poetry as a missing narrative, I trace the trajectory of Hodgson’s Islamicate civilization, complimented by Bruce B Lawrence’s *barzakh*logic. With this approach, my analysis of Kabir’s poetry offers new and vast implications for the civilizational legacy of South Asia.

**Keywords:** *Asabiyya*, *barzakh,* Bhakti-Sufi network*,* Islamicate civilization*,* Kabir, *muhabbat-e kul*