

Kabir at Maghar: A Model of Composite Culture

I

Kabir among the Muslims of Maghar: Reception, Adaptation and Accommodation

The present section explores Kabir's presence among the Muslims of Maghar and examines how they perceive Kabir. The previous studies give just passing references to Muslims' attachment to Kabir at Maghar in the context of their visit to the Kabir *Mazar*. However, no scholar has given any attention to the Muslims of Maghar town (which itself consists of Kabir's shrines at its east periphery) in terms of their relationship with Kabir. During the course of my fieldwork at Maghar from 2016 to the early months of 2022, I found that the Muslims of Maghar look up to Kabir as one of their own. They perceive him as a Sufi or *Pir* or *Wali* and address him as Kabiruddin Shah. They frequently visit Kabir's shrine, offer *fatih*a, recognize and claim Kabir to be their own. For their faith in Kabir, they claim to reject the propagation of the orthodox Deobandi and Wahhabi Islamic groups, which give a strong emphasis on purifying Islam of the non-Islamic elements. It is interesting to note that in the increasing fire of communalism when religious leaders impose strict segregational codes on their followers shunning mixed religious practices, the Muslims of Maghar have not only preserved the tradition of their attachment to Kabir but also foster this syncretic tradition for the future generations. Kabir seems to be a part of their cultural, religious and social life at Maghar.

Historical Traces of Kabir among Muslims

Kabir is said to have passed away in 1518 at Maghar³⁰⁰. The popular legend of Kabir's death suggests that Kabir was equally popular among Muslims. At the time of the death of Kabir, both the Hindu and Muslim followers of Kabir began to fight in order to cremate his dead body according to the funeral rites of their respective religions. It suggests that Kabir also had a strong following among Muslims. In his essay "The History of Islam in India", James Brown writes: "The teachings of Kabir, who died about 1518 A.D., gained for him a following among both Muslims and Hindus" (p. 25). In his *Influences of Islam on Indian Culture*, Tara Chand also notes: "He had numerous Hindu and Muslim disciples" (p. 165).

Muslims might also have been attracted to Kabir because of the similarities which they found between his concept of *bhakti* and *Sufi* Islam. In *Lovers of God: Sufism and the Politics of Islam in Medieval India*, Raziuddin Aquil points out these similarities, "In the teachings of Kabir and Nanak one can see the clear imprint of Sufi Islam: the criticism of idol worship, of useless ritual, emphasis on equality, emphasis on one God, are all to be traced to Sufism" (pp. 26-27).

Different scholars have mentioned Kabir's presence and popularity among the Muslims from his time to mid twentieth century. We have already studied it in detail in the first chapter. Westcott (1907), Keay (1931), K. Dwivedi (1965) and Vaudeville (1974) give passing references to Muslim followers of Kabir, especially in the context of their visit to the Kabir *Mazar* at Maghar. However, no scholar has paid attention to how the Muslims of

³⁰⁰ Maghar is about sixteen miles away from Gorakhpur. Previously, Maghar used to be a part of the Basti district, but it is now in the Sant Kabir Nagar district which was formed in 1997 by Ms. Mayavati, the then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. According to the 2011 Census of India, the population of Maghar is 19181. There are 53.73% Muslims, 46.01% Hindus, 0.13% Christians, 0.02% Buddhists and 0.11 % (not stated) in Maghar. According to the people of Maghar, this population has now grown beyond 30000.

Maghar town (where both shrines of Kabir are located)³⁰¹ perceive Kabir and what position Kabir holds among them.

Like Keay, Westcott, K. Dwivedi and Vaudeville, I have also focused on Kabir's shrines at Maghar, but my study is not limited to Kabir's shrines only, but also extends to the Muslims of Maghar and neighbouring places. In case of the Muslims of other places, I have focused on those who regularly visited Kabir's shrines. During the course of my fieldwork at Maghar from 2016 to the early months of 2022, I discovered that the Muslims of Maghar are intimately associated with Kabir and his shrines are an integral part of their social, cultural and religious milieu. Owning Kabir, they bring him into the fold of Sufi stream of Islam. The present section focuses on the same phenomenon and examines how Kabir is attached to them.

Kabir among the Muslims at Maghar

At Maghar, Kabir's presence among Muslims can be seen in the following spheres: Kabir's relics and legends among the Muslims of Maghar, the faith of the Muslims in Kabir, the celebration of *Urs* (the death anniversary of Kabir), Muslims' attraction to the message of humanity of Kabir and his impartial approach to religions, and Muslims' appreciation of Kabir's *vanis*.

³⁰¹ One recent study, which explores Kabir's presence among Muslims, is based on Varanasi. In his thesis "Images of Kabir: As Described by Yadav in Assi and Nagwa, and Julaha in Shivala and Saket Nagar" (2008), Kristian Niemi selected five Muslim men weavers and five women weavers and tried to know their views on Kabir and found that most of them were familiar with Kabir's teachings, but none owned Kabir. Gyanendra Pandey (1992) had already noted the Muslims' ignorance of Kabir in Banaras: "Older weavers in Banaras today state that no one in the community knows the name of Kabir, except for young weavers who may have picked it up through a 'secular' education in school or college or through exposure to television" (pp. 89-90). In a movie, "*Had-Anhad*", during an interview with some Muslims of Banaras conducted by Shabnam Virmani, they disown Kabir. During my fieldwork at Lohata, Maidagin and Sundarpur in Banaras in 2016, I found many Muslims familiar with Kabir's stories and teachings. They perceived him with great respect. However, a couple of Muslims refused to acknowledge Kabir. I propose that an extensive fieldwork is needed to understand the place of Kabir among the Muslims of Banaras as all fieldworks including mine are limited.

a) Kabir's Relics and Legends among the Muslims

There are two shrines of Kabir at Maghar: Kabir *Samadhi* and Kabir *Mazar*. These two shrines – one belongs to the Hindus and the other belongs to the Muslims – are said to be the result of the conflict over the cremation of Kabir's dead body (the legend has already been discussed in detail in the second chapter). I visited these shrines for the first time in October 2016 and I discovered many Muslims visiting Kabir *Mazar* and offering *fatiha* and looking at the Kabir *Samadhi* from the campus of *Mazar* and some of them also went to the campus of the *Samadhi* temple. There were also many Kabirpanthi and non-Kabirpanthi Hindus visiting and receiving blessings of Kabir from both the places. I observed that Kabir was equally dear to both the Hindus and Muslims who regularly share Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*³⁰².



Figure 34: Muslims men and women entering the campus of Kabir *Samadhi* Temple

³⁰² The large campus of Kabir's *Nirvana Sthali* consists of Kabir's Hindu *Samadhi*, Kabir's Muslim *Mazar*, Kabir's cave, Lord Shiva Temple, Mosque, banks of Ami river. It is striking to note that the mosque (which is adjacent to the northeast fence of the Kabir *Math*) and the old Lord Shiva temple (which is beside the bank of the Ami river on the campus of the *Sthali*) seem less important than Kabir *Mazar* and Kabir *Samadhi*. From the religious perspective, they appear negligible before Kabir in the sense that people mostly visit Kabir, not them to offer their reverence. The following view of Jay Prakash Gupta, a regular worshipper of Lord Shiva, reveals how Kabir's shrines are more significant for Hindus than Lord Shiva's shrine: "This is the temple of Shiva. This temple is not as important as Kabir's shrines. People do not have any faith in him (Lord Shiva). They have faith only in Kabir. This is the Shiva temple. It is an old temple. There is no faith here (in Lord Shiva). The people only visit and go away from here and there is no more importance. It does not have any significance (meaning) for people." In fact, Kabir's shrines dominate the entire atmosphere of Maghar and have become the main place of pilgrimage of Maghar. People are more attracted to these shrines.

I visited Maghar for the second time on 09 January 2017 and stayed there till 18 January 2017. I visited Maghar subsequently on many occasions till the early months of 2022. While interacting with Muslims, I found that one of the reasons of their attraction to Kabir was the stories or legends of his miracles performed at Maghar³⁰³. The legends associated with Maghar and Kabir are popular among them. The legends about Kabir's arrival at Maghar, his removing the twelve-year long drought and bringing water to Maghar, and his turning into flowers at the time of death etc. can be heard through most of the Muslims of Maghar and are the part of their life³⁰⁴.

I observed that the Muslims of Maghar perceive these stories and legends of Kabir as the *karamats* (miracles) performed by Kabir. As the *karamats* (miracles) of *Sufis* have always attracted Muslims, Kabir's miracles have also attracted the Muslims of Maghar and its neighbouring places towards him and established his authority among them³⁰⁵. Kabir's shrines remind them of Kabir's *karamats* and spiritual powers. Barbara Metcalf's following observation is quite appropriate in the context of Kabir: "Sufi shrines are sites of institutionalized charisma conceptualized as *baraka* (spiritual power) and *karamat* (miraculous power)" (p. 236).

b) Faith of the Muslims in Kabir

The Muslims of Maghar regard Kabir as their *Wali* or *Fakir* or *Bujurg* or *Pir* or *Baba*. Kabir is addressed as Baba Kabiruddinshah by many Muslims of Maghar. They look at him with great respect and reverence. Ali Hussain Ansari (22 years old), the cousin of Khadim

³⁰³ Muslims have been attracted to miracles (*karamats*) of prominent Sufi saints. Kabir has also earned popularity among the Muslims of Maghar as a great Sufi saint on account of his miracles.

³⁰⁴ Kabir's leaving Banaras and settling at Maghar in order to end its curse or prejudice (after death in Maghar, one incarnates as a donkey) also give them a feeling of superiority, pride and confidence. The Muslims claim that they are proud of Kabir and of themselves as being the citizens of Maghar. They express their sincere gratitude to Kabir.

³⁰⁵ Aquil suggests that miracle or *karamat* is the source of authority for Sufis (p. 54).

Hussain Ansari (Mutvalli of the *Mazar*), comments: “According to our faith, we regard Baba as Hazrat Baba Kabiruddin Shah, but you call Kabir Saheb. We address him as Hazrat Baba Kabiruddin Shah, Rahmtullah Aliah. He is a *Wali*”. Mohammad Aftab Alam (40 years old) also claims Kabir to be Baba Kabirudddin Shah: “No, he is not Kabir Das. He is Baba Kabirudddin Shah. In reality, he is the Baba. ‘Baba’ means that man or personality in whom there are *bujurgi* (the characteristics of a Sufi saint) and whose heart is replete with *nur-e-ilahi* (God’s light)”. Mohammad Rayis (35 years old) perceives Kabir as a *Wali* and believes that Kabir has done wonders. According to him, the Muslims of Maghar love him: “We give him the status of a *Wali*. It means that he has performed wonders/miracles. God has bestowed spiritual powers upon him. Brother, we cannot become like him.... All people remember him. We remember and love him.” Abdul Navi Ansari (75 years old) perceives him as a messenger (prophet) of God (Allah): “My personal opinion is that he was a great person and you must accept that he was the messenger of God. He came here to enlighten people with the right path and right teachings.” Haji Mohammad Rafiq (60 years old) finds the authority of *fakiri* in Kabir: “From my point of view, Kabir was an old man, and whether the world accepts it or not, I certainly believe in him that he was a *Bujurg* (Sufi saint). There was *fakiri* in him. He had the emperorship in *fakiri* (the highest quality of *fakiri*).”

These views clearly suggest that Kabir is a venerable Sufi figure among the Muslims of Maghar. They own Kabir as a part of Sufi Islam and fully claim and express their faith in Kabir. Ashraf Ali (55 years old) says: “I have faith in Kabir. O brother, his *Mazar* has been built here. All the Hindus and Muslims go there. People from outside also come here. So living here, why should I not go there?” Maulvi Firoj Ahmad (48 years old), the caretaker of the mosque on the campus of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*, holds that the entire Maghar has faith in

Kabir: “We visit the *Mazar* every day³⁰⁶. The entire town has faith in Kabir. Kabir was a saint.” Abdul Navi Ansari also claims that all follow Kabir and have faith in him: “Here children, old and young persons all have faith in Kabir.” Jainullah (100 years old) also claims his faith in Kabir: “I have witnessed faith of others in Kabir since the beginning. Why should I not have faith in him?” Expressing his strong faith in Kabir, Mehndi Hasan Ansari (38 years old) holds Kabir responsible for the peaceful environment of Maghar: “I certainly have faith in Kabir Saheb. I follow him. We (Muslims) always follow Baba Kabir Saheb and always receive his blessings. Due to Baba Kabir Saheb, here there is a very good and peaceful atmosphere.” According to Kalamuddin Manshoori (who is 60 years old and runs a shop with name of Kabir Tent House), all the people of Maghar have faith in Kabir. Due to his faith in Kabir, he devotes himself to the service of Kabir on the occasions of Kabir programmes: “All the people have faith in him and I am also among them. I run a shop in his name. He is adorable. Therefore, I have faith in Kabir. And if there is a programme associated with him, I serve him without any hesitation. Whether I am paid or not, I serve whatever programme is held at his place.” On 3 June 2019, at a grocery shop in Maghar, I interviewed Rajaram Yadav (73 years old) and recorded his opinion about whether the Muslims have faith in Kabir. Rajaram Yadav replied that about 30% Muslims had faith in Kabir. At this, he was immediately interrupted and objected to by Mohammad Shahid Ansari (30 years old):

Why not, they also have faith in Kabir. All believe in Kabir. You are giving the wrong information. The Muslims have the same faith in Kabir as the Hindus have.... All people have faith in (Kabir) who walked taking everyone together. A large number of couplets of Kabir that you come to hear, give the people of all the communities and religions the message to have harmonious relationship among people.... You must have visited the *Mazar* and seen there. The *Mazar* and the temple are standing side by side. They reflect the faith of the people associated with Kabir. I am a Muslim, but have faith in him.

³⁰⁶ Almost all the Muslims of Maghar who I interacted with claim they regularly visit Kabir’s shrines. This statement expresses their strong attachment to Kabir although they do not visit Kabir’s shrines every day.

On the basis of the above views, we can infer that there has been an unbroken tradition of the Muslims' faith in Kabir at Maghar. The common faith of both Hindus and Muslims of Maghar that 'Kabir's presence ensures a peaceful environment in Maghar (this phenomenon will be further discussed in detail in the next section)' brings Kabir close to them. The location of Kabir's shrines in their whereabouts and their regular veneration by outsider Hindus and Muslims, Kabir's strong direct and indirect influences in all the religious, social, cultural and political spheres of Maghar also lead them to appreciate the greatness of Kabir and increase their faith in him.

The Muslims' faith in Kabir is also expressed at the time of their festivals. The Muslims of Maghar and other places visit Kabir's both shrines on the occasions of their festivals too. On the occasion of Eid on 5 June 2019, I recorded many Muslim men and women visiting Kabir's shrines, especially Kabir *Mazar*.



Figure 35: Muslims visiting Kabir *Mazar* and Kabir *Samadhi* on the occasion of Eid 2019

Shaida Hussain (36 years old), the brother of Khadim Hussain Ansari, rightly points out that Kabir becomes the part of a few of the Muslim festivals of Maghar and neighbouring

places. Muslim's strong connection with Kabir is seen on the occasion of their festival Shab-e-Barat³⁰⁷. On this occasion, Muslims in large numbers submit their prayers and recite *fatiha* at the *Mazar* of Kabir like at other *Mazars* of Sufi saints. Shaida Hussain confirms the fact that on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat, Muslims in large numbers offer *fatiha*: "Absolutely, all the Muslims have faith in Kabir. Come on occasion of the night of Shab-e-Barat and see how many people come here. You will see the fair (a huge crowd) throughout the night. On that day, you can discover whether the Muslims follow Kabir Saheb or not." In fact, Kabir has become the part of everyday social and religious life of the Muslims of Maghar and its neighbouring regions.

Everyday problems of the Muslims also drive their visits to Kabir's shrines. That's Muslims visit Kabir also for his blessings in order to resolve their everyday problems. Abdul Navi Ansari exclaims with a great devotion to Kabir: "O God, we go there to offer *tasbeeh* (reverence/prayer)! We offer *tasbeeh* saying that we have left home and are in some complications or in some other problems." Kalamuddin Manshoori who holds an intense devotion to Kabir says: "Going there in the morning and evening, we offer *dua* (prayer). We recite *fatiha* for his blessings. We visit the *Mazar* and the temple and express our faith in him."

In Islamic spiritual culture, it is believed that Sufi saints continue to live even after death and they have the power of intercession; they act as intermediaries between God and followers. They listen to, convey the difficulties, sorrows and wishes of the followers to God and plead with Him to resolve and fulfil them respectively. Since they are pure souls and are close to God, He immediately listens to them. In *Devotional Islam and Politics in British*

³⁰⁷ Shab-e-Barat is celebrated by Muslims all over the world. Muslims believe that on the night of Shab-e-Barat, God writes the destinies of all men and women for the coming year by taking into account the deeds they committed in the past. On this occasion, Muslims collectively worship and ask for forgiveness of their wrongdoings. They also believe that their worship will reward them with fortune for the whole year and cleanse them of their sins. Visiting graves and reciting *fatiha* at them form the main components of this worship.

India, Usha Sanyal aptly points out that “ordinary folk approach a shrine in the hope that the dead man will intercede for them. The chain of intercession starts at the grave of the local pir, and goes right up to the Prophet, who is closest to Allah, and whose intercession on one’s behalf will never be denied” (p. 119).

The Muslims who visit Kabir’s shrines are mostly Sunni Muslims³⁰⁸. Khadim Hussain (38 years old), the main caretaker or *sajjada-nishin* (*Mutvalli*) of the *Mazar*, told me in an interview that Muslims, especially Sunni Muslims in large numbers, visit Kabir to offer prayers (*fatiha*), but those associated with Deobandi³⁰⁹ and Wahhabi³¹⁰ traditions (which give emphasis on purifying Islam of the non-Islamic elements) generally avoid reading *fatiha* at the *Mazar*³¹¹. On the other hand, the Sunni Muslims associated with Barelvi tradition³¹² pay *ziyarat*³¹³ to Kabir and recite *fatiha* at Kabir *Mazar*. Shivamangal, the government caretaker of both shrines of Kabir, also testifies to this fact: “The Muslims who are lovers of Kabir come here (Kabir *Mazar*). Those who believe in him also go there (to *Samadhi*). They also come here.... The Barelvi Muslims (the liberal Muslims who have faith in the shrines of Sufis) come, kiss, lick (the *Mazar* of Kabir) and sit with devotion, and offer *fatiha*.”

³⁰⁸ According to Metcalf, Sunni Muslims constitute the “majority of Muslims which accept the authority of the whole first generation of Muslims and the validity of the historical community, in contrast to the Kharijis and the Shi’ah” (p. 367).

³⁰⁹ Deobandi is an Islamic revivalist movement within Sunni (primarily Hanafi) Islam that formed during the late 19th century around the Darul Uloom Islamic seminary in the town of Deoband, India, from which the name derives. Metcalf writes: “the reformist ‘ulama,’ of whom the most important group is that associated with a theological academy founded in the town of Deoband in 1867” (pp. 12-13).

³¹⁰ Wahhabi is an Islamic revivalist movement and doctrine that started within Sunni (primarily Hanbali) Islam. It is associated with the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Metcalf points out that “Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab ... had initiated a far-reaching movement that emphasized the elimination of customary practices and a return to principles embedded in scripture” (pp. 277-78). John Obert Voll also writes: “Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab ... vigorously rejected the whole structure of the Sufi devotional practices as being unwholesome innovations. He proclaimed that veneration for any human, however saintly, constituted shirk or polytheism ... [he] replaced the pantheistic style of Sufi theology with a renewed emphasis on the interpretation of tawhid, the oneness of God, that stressed God’s transcendence” (p. 61).

³¹¹ However, all Muslims associated with Deobandi and Wahhabi traditions also visit Kabir and pay *ziyarat* or recite *fatiha* on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat.

³¹² Barelvi is a Sunni revivalist movement which developed under the leadership of Sufi scholar Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi (1856–1921) around 1870-1890, in opposition to contemporary revivalist Deobandi and Ahl-i-Hadith movements. Usha Sanyal notes: “Ahmad Riza’s followers were called Barelvi simply because he was a resident of the town of Bareilly, in Rohilkhand [the western portion of present-day Uttar Pradesh]” (p. 8).

³¹³ Sanyal explains the term *ziyarat*: “Whether one visits a tomb during an ‘urs or at any other time of the year, such a visit is respectfully termed *ziyarat*” (p. 117).

However, the orthodox Islamic movements such as Deobandi, Wahhabi, Ahl-e-Hadis³¹⁴ etc. generally look at such practices popular in the Sufi circle as a danger to true Islam and emphasize on purifying Islam of these practices.³¹⁵ Imtiaz Ahmad writes: “Most puritanical and orthodox Muslims see any form of Sufism or close interchange with other religions as a danger to true Islam. For them, the Sufis lacked the appropriate moral rigour” (p. xxii). He further adds: “Many of the Sufi practices that adherents of Barelvi practice such as visiting the tombs of saints, are opposed by adherents of another school known as Deobandi which regards such practices as being un-Islamic” (p. 114). These orthodox movements tend to purify Islam of all non-Muslims elements including Sufi traditions. According to them, Islam adheres to the Quran and its ancient form. Barbara Metcalf writes: “[I]n seeking to define individual morality on the basis of a return to true Islam, the movements have eschewed customary practices, tending to be "scripturalist" in returning to the written records of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet” (pp. 5-6). Imtiaz Ahmad also notes:

The Muslim reform movements that began from the eighteenth century onwards in reaction to the loss of political power to non-Muslims — Hindus, Sikhs and later the British as well as the upsurge of Shi‘ism aimed to purify Indian Islam from Hindu influences, which were seen as un-Islamic. The

³¹⁴ Sanyal notes the orthodox nature of Ahl-e-Hadis: “The Ahl-e Hadis preference for direct access to the sources of religious authority was also transparent in their disapproval of sufism, believed to be ‘a danger to true religion’” (p. 39).

³¹⁵ Besides these practices, there is also an ideological difference between Sufism and other forms of Islam. Aquil notes down this difference:

What distinguished Sufism from other forms of Islam was its belief that a human soul could achieve union with God, a belief formulated in the doctrine of *wahdat-ul-wujud* (unity of existence, or monism as a reality) by the thirteenth-century Sufi master, Ibn al-Arabi. This doctrine often brought Sufis into conflict with Islamic orthodoxy (represented by the Sunni Hanafi ulama). The latter believed that God was unique and, therefore, to suggest that a human soul could achieve union with God was to imply that there was no distinction between God and human beings. It was for this reason that Sufis were occasionally attacked and persecuted. Sufis were also targeted by the ulama for their occasional indifference to formal religious practices such as regular congregational prayers (*namaz/salat*), instead focusing on meditation and spiritual exercises which included music. The legitimacy of the latter, that is, listening to music in *sama* or *qawwali*, was a major source of confrontation between the ulama and Sufis. (pp. 65-66)

practice of the veneration of saints and the intermediary role of pirs especially came under attack. (p. 257)

In spite of the criticisms by the Deobandi, Wahhabi and Ahl-i-Hadis practitioners, Barelvi practices such as visiting tombs of Sufi saints, offering *fatiha*, celebrating *Urs* and treating Sufi saints as intercessors or intermediators between God and followers have flourished and have been popular in Indian subcontinent. Aquil rightly points out: “Despite opposition from various quarters, Sufism remains a vibrant movement, attracting devotees from across various strata of society: rural-urban poor, thugs, criminals, politicians and ministers can be seen offering ritual Sufic chadars and prostrating in the dargahs” (p. 69).

At Maghar, Muslims offer *fatiha* at Kabir *Mazar*, but very few Muslims enter the Kabir *Samadhi* temple to offer prayer or *dua*. However, many Muslims take a look from outside at the Kabir *Samadhi* temple and other relics associated with Kabir. It is common on the part of the Muslims to go across the campuses of the *Samadhi* and *Mazar* through a common passage. Harisharan Das Shastri (50 years old), a *sadhu* from Maghar Kabir *Math* made a significant observation about Muslims’ visit, which is similar to that of mine:

Here there is a very good atmosphere. You will see that many (Muslim) women from Maghar come to *Mazar* and they also come straight to the temple. So, one view is seen here that there are many religious places where the people of only one religion visit³¹⁶, but here at the wonderful place of Kabir Saheb, Muslim women and men enter the campus of the *Mazar* and passing by the temple, they go out through the same passage.

I have also recorded interviews of a few Muslims visiting Kabir *Samadhi* and offering prayer to Kabir. However, not all Muslims enter the *Samadhi* temple. The orthodox Muslims

³¹⁶ Sufi shrines in India have been the places shared by both the Hindus and Muslims. Commenting on Hindus’ attraction to Sufi shrines, I. Ahmad says: “The widespread veneration of Muslim holy figures among Hindus is a phenomenon that is common to almost all parts of India. Sufi saints, seen as powerful beings capable of performing miracles, healing the ill, granting children to barren women, providing a job to the unemployed, averting the evil eye and so on, are widely propitiated as *devtas* or gods by Hindus, who see them as part of their vast pantheon of deities” (p. 169)

generally believe that offering *dua* at a temple is not sanctioned in Islam. Ahmad Allah Ansari, an orthodox Muslim (60 years old), says:

A Muslim does not have faith in *Samadhi*. He worships only *Khuda* (God). He visits *Mazar* and offers *fatiha*. According to the *Kalma* (Muslim faith), a Muslim is not allowed to worship any human being. To worship *Mazar* is also not allowed, but to offer *fatiha* at *Mazar* is only permissible, which is prevalent even today? To offer *fatiha* is prevalent in Islam and it has been the trend for years. To offer *fatiha* at graves is permissible everywhere in the world.



Figure 36: Muslim followers of Kabir at Kabir *Samadhi* and Kabir *Mazar*

Ahmad Allah Ansari gives a scriptural interpretation of Islam and expresses an irreverent attitude to Kabir *Samadhi* temple. However, it is my personal observation that most of the Muslims of Maghar and other places hold both the shrines in great reverence (it will be discussed in detail in the next section). Javed Ahmad (39 years old) who is often invited to cook food in the *bhandaras* held by the Kabir *Math* and receives a great deal of love and affection from them sheds light on the Muslims' respect for both the monuments of Kabir: "All the Muslims have faith in Kabir here.... There are two shrines built here. There is one of the Hindu brothers and one of the Muslim brothers. It has been the tradition for centuries that all Hindus and Muslims brothers have faith in him."



Figure 37: A Muslim family visiting and worshipping Kabir at the Kabir *Samadhi* temple

Both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar not only show faith in Kabir but also follow and implement the messages of Kabir in their life. Its reflection can be seen and experienced in their behaviour, daily life as well as in their views. Mohammad Shahid Ansari accepts that the entire Maghar is heading and progressing as per the words of Kabir. Abdul Navi Ansari also testifies to the fact that both Hindus and Muslims follow the messages of Kabir: “Here, you should understand that Maghar is well known in the name of Kabir. Here, there is the population of both the Hindus and Muslims, but there has never been any discrimination between them. Both the communities have faith in Kabir Das and implement his messages in their lives. The whole town follows the message of Kabir.”

Many Muslims of Maghar and other places have also been associated with Kabir *Mazar* through the *muridi* (*guru* and disciple) tradition. Shaida Hussain Ansari says that many Muslims are associated with Kabir and his *Mazar* through the *muridi* tradition. According to him, many outsider Muslims have also taken *muridi* and have a great faith in

Kabir. In January 2017, I interacted with Khadim Hussain (60 years old, not to be confused with the *Mutvalli* of the *Mazar*) and his daughter from Fatehpur, who offered a blanket³¹⁷ to Kabir after the fulfilment of their wish. He told me that many Muslims from Fatehpur have faith in Kabir and Sufi principles. Shaida Hussain revealed to me that there are also many such Muslim venerables associated with Kabir, who have a large number of followers and visit Kabir's *Mazar* with them.

The above discussion reflects that the Muslims of Maghar and some of its neighbouring places continue to have faith in Kabir on the pattern of the Sufi tradition. Kabir continues to exert a great influence on them.

c) Celebration of *Urs* at Kabir *Mazar*

The celebration of *Urs*³¹⁸ at the Kabir *Mazar* is a living tradition of the Muslims' faith in Kabir. The Muslims of Maghar still participate in *Urs* which brings Kabir close to them. Before I discuss the celebration of *Urs*, I would like to cite here G. H. Westcott's description of the *Urs*. Westcott gives the following description of the tradition of the *Urs* organized at the Kabir *Mazar*.

In connection with the Muhammadan Math a largely attended Mela is held on the last day of Aghan (November). In connection with this Mela³¹⁹ a sacred feast is held. The Mahant proceeds to the shrine, followed by the Diwan, carrying in both hands a large dish (*thambe*) containing *Khichri* (cooked rice mixed with *dal*) and by a *Bandali* carrying an earthenware vessel (*Karwa*) containing water and covered over with a white cloth. Upon reaching the shrine, these vessels are placed upon the ground and frankincense is burnt upon the tomb, in a fire of cow dung. The Mahant repeats certain prayers in which all present take their part.

At the conclusion of the prayers he takes his seat upon the ground while the Diwan gives to each of the worshippers a small portion of the *Khichri* and the

³¹⁷ Offering blanket on the shrine of a Sufi saint is a common practice in India.

³¹⁸ Sanyal explains *Urs* as "literally 'wedding', celebration of a saint's death anniversary when his soul is believed to unite with Allah" (p. 343).

³¹⁹ Khadim Hussain Ansari tells that no such *mela* was held, rather the huge crowd participating in the *Urs* used to take the form of a fair.

Bandali pours from the spout of the *Karwa* a few drops of the water into the palm of their hands. When all have received, the Diwan and *Bandali* consume what is left. More prayers are said, after which the Mahant departs and the gathering breaks up.

Pilgrims to the shrine are expected to present a rupee to the officer in charge and also an offering of rice and *dal*. They receive in return a small portion of *Khichri* and a pinch of the ashes that result from burning of the frankincense and cowdung. (pp. 58-59)

The description of Westcott suggests Kabir's strong presence among the Muslims of Maghar.

Description of the *Urs* Based on My Fieldwork

This *Urs* is celebrated every year as Kabir Nirvana Divas as per the Islamic tradition. It is held on 27 of the Arabic month Rajab, due to which the date of the *Urs* in the Gregorian calendar varies every year. I recorded the celebration of the *Urs* in May 2017 and April 2019.

In the morning of this day, *Qurankhani* (the recitation of the verses of the Quran) is performed at the *Mazar* by the students of a couple of *madrasas* of Maghar³²⁰. This continues for about an hour. After the *Qurankhani*, the caretakers, performers of *Qurankhani* and other Muslims present there offer *fatiha* at Kabir *Mazar*. It is followed by the distribution of sweets (*Prasad*) among them and the saints of the Kabir *Math*.

³²⁰ Khadim Hussain tells that more than fifty students come from madrasas to perform *Qurankhani*. However, in the *Urs* celebrations of 2017 and 2019, four and 20-25 Muslim students performed *Qurankhani* respectively. According to him, this number increases and decreases according to the schedules (working days) of the *madrasas*. When *madrasas* are open at the time of the celebration of the *Urs*, more students come. When all *madrasas* are closed, *Hafizes* (the Muslims who have memorized the whole Quran) from Maghar are invited to perform *Qurankhani*.



Figure 38: Performance of *Qurankhani* at *Kabir Mazar*

About at 10 am, the procession to bring a blanket for the *Kabir Mazar* is prepared at the *Katayi Mill Chauraha* of *Maghar*, which is about 2 kilometres away from the *Mazar*. This custom is known as *Chadarposhi*. More than two dozen Muslims participate in the procession. When the procession progresses, more people, especially the Muslims of *Karam Kabir Mohalla* join it. Some Hindu and Muslims offer money into the blanket expressing their reverence to *Kabir*.



Figure 39: Procession of *Chadarposhi* to Kabir

During the procession, devotional Sufi songs are sung in praise of Kabir. Since 2019, a group of the *Qawwals* (Ahmad brothers) have been invited to sing Sufi songs.

About half an hour later, the procession reaches the Kabir *Mazar*. More devotional songs attributed to the greatness of Kabir are sung at the *Mazar* and then, the blanket is offered and spread on the *Mazar* of Kabir. The *Mutvalli* and his brothers decorate it with flowers and apply perfume on it. Fruits, sweets etc. are also placed there. Incense sticks are lit. Then, *Qurankhani* is again performed. All present there participate in it. It continues for about 20-25 minutes. At its end, the *Mahant Vichar Saheb* and other saints are also invited³²¹. All stand around the *Mazar* and a collective prayer is recited. After the prayer, all sit down and offer *fatiha* at the *Mazar*. Devotional songs are again sung. The ceremony of offering the

³²¹ In 2017, Vichar Das and two *Mahants* respectively from Haryana and Delhi were invited. They offered a blanket and garlands of flowers at the Kabir *Mazar*.

blanket ends with the distribution of *Prasad* made of fruits and sweets among the people present there.



Figure 40: Performance of *Qurankhani* after *Chadarposhi* to Kabir

The *Chadarposhi* ceremony is followed by the *bhandara* (feast) in which *khichadi*, the main meal (*Prasad*), is offered to people. Along with *Mahant Vichar Das*, other saints of the *Math*, ordinary Kabirpanthis and non-Kabirpanthis visiting Kabir's shrines also participate in the *bhandara*. However, most of persons who participate in the *Urs* are the Muslims of Maghar. 300-400 people³²² eat *khichadi* in the *bhandara*. Many of the Muslims also take *khichadi* to their homes. The *Urs* ends by 4 pm.

³²² According to Shivamangal [he is 58 years old and originally belongs to Munderwa, Basti. He has now settled at Maghar. He was the *smarak parichar* (caretaker) of the Kabir *Mazar* and *Samadhi* appointed by the Uttar Pradesh Archaeological Department. He served there for the 38 years and was retired in 2018], during the time of *Mutvalli Mansrullhak* (he was also a landlord), around 2000-3000 people participated in the *Urs*. The people, especially the Muslims from Maghar, and its neighbouring regions such as Kermaua, Mehdawal, Bakhira, Amardobha, Hardi and Siswa (in Basti district, now in Sant Kabir Nagar district) and Bharpahi, Udwalia and Mahrabari (in Gorakhpur district) were invited. The occasion took the form of a fair. The Hindus and the Kabirpanthis of the *Math* were also invited. Around 20-25 Hindus used to participate in it. The Muslims had a strong faith in Kabir. They used to kiss his *Mazar* and read *fatiha* at it and partake its *Prasad*.

Till late 1980s, on the occasion of the *Urs*, a huge crowd of the Muslims gathered, but after that a decline started in the number of the Muslims who came to the *Mazar*. According to Shivamangal, the main



Figure 41: Muslims of Maghar participating in *Urs* (feast) of Kabir *Mazar*

reason of this decline was the emergence of the Deobandi and Barelvi traditions in the Muslim community of Maghar and those of other places. Previously, there were no such groups as Deobandi and Barelvi. Receiving offered food and kissing graves was a common practice, but since the Deobandi group emerged, such activities and practices have been limited only to the Barelvi group. There is even a rivalry between the Deobandi and Barelvi. Deobandi followers deprecate them as the shrine-worshipping, grave-worshipping, ignorant Barelvis. Previously, there was no such a thing. Therefore, all the people of Maghar — old, young and children from the Muslim community — used to participate in the *bhandara* (*Urs*) and take *Prasad*. There was not even a spark of discrimination, but now there is the trend among them that they will not take the *Prasad* of *Mazar*. Whatever hypocrisy they (Deobandi Muslims) show today, was not earlier in practice. Such things have been happening since 1980s.

Even some of the relatives of Khadim Hussain have become Deobandi themselves and they do not participate in the *Urs*. Shivamangal highlights the fact:

Now they (Deobandi Muslims) do not come. One pollution of Deobandi has spread. More than half of his main relatives have become Deobandi. At that time, they would all participate in *Urs*. They all followed Kabir. They have also become Deobandi. Now they do not follow Kabir... This is the matter of fact. Half of the relatives have now become Deobandi; why will they come?

Khadim Hussain accepts the fact of Deobandi and Barelvi regarding the Muslim attachment to Kabir. However, he tells some more reasons of the decline of the Muslims' participation in the *Urs*:

The *zamindari* of the family has ended. On the other hand, people have no time. They are busy with their livelihood. Previously, there was poverty; more people used to come to eat *khichadi*. People have now more prosperity and convenience. Today people do not want to eat *khichadi*. In poverty, people liked to eat *khichadi* ... In spite of invitation, people now do not come.

The views of both Shivamangal and Khadim Hussain suggest how the modern movements e.g. Deobandi and Wahhabi are compartmentalizing Islam.

Significance of the *Urs*

The celebration of *Urs* at *Kabir Mazar* is a living culture of the Muslims' faith in Kabir. It is an Islamic tradition of Maghar to celebrate Kabir Nirvana Divas. In place of *Chauka* ritual and recitation of *Bijak* along with *Havan Puja*, the recitation of verses from the Quran and other Sufi devotional prayers are performed in praise of Kabir and his greatness. Since the *Qurankhani* is performed by the Muslim students of Maghar and other places, this nurtures a culture of Kabir among them and other Muslims present on the occasion.

The procession of the *Chadarposhi* accompanied by the performance of devotional Sufi songs certainly spreads the message of Kabir among the Muslims and Hindus of Maghar. A feeling of respect towards Kabir and the procession (*Chadarposhi*) can be seen among the Muslim and Hindu people of Maghar.

Qurankhani (the recitation of the verses from the Quran) at the *Mazar* and the ceremony of the procession of *Chadarposhi* heading towards the *Mazar* through the streets of Maghar dilute Kabir's identity as a Hindu Kabirpanthi god or Hindu saint³²³. During the whole celebration of *Urs*, Kabir adopts a Muslim identity. In fact, Kabir had his original Muslim identity till the eighteenth century. However, the process of Hinduizing Kabir in Kabirpanth and outside which began in the nineteenth century under the colonial impact has exclusively constructed a Hindu identity of Kabir. In *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Gyanendra Pandey aptly points out: "It may be worthwhile to record that the Kabirpanth, which may be thought to have a substantial following among Muslim weavers, given Kabir's own origins and life among the Julahas of Banaras, was by the later nineteenth century being seen as an exclusively Hindu preserve" (pp. 89-90).

³²³ However, the offering of flowers, incense sticks and *bhandara* demonstrate a fusion of Hindu and Muslim ways of worship.

On this occasion, Muslims of Maghar and Kabirpanthi saints and followers present at the *Math* take food sitting together. They have a tolerant attitude to one another. There also takes place an interaction between Islamic (associated with the *Mazar*) and Kabirpanthi traditions. The *Mutvalli* welcomes Kabirpanthis saying *Saheb Bandagi* to them. Kabirpanthis from other places also perceive the *Mutvalli* as a Kabirpanthi *Mahant*. They also offer *Saheb Bandagi* at the feet of the *Mutvalli (Mujawar)* in the same way as they offer to *Mahants* and *Gurus* of the Kabirpanth.



Figure 42: *Mahant and sadhus* of Maghar Kabir *Math* participating in the *Urs*

d) Muslims' Attraction to Kabir's Messages of Humanity and His Impartiality

I found many Muslims of Maghar and its neighbouring places attracted to Kabir for his messages to humanity and his spirit of impartiality and secularism. The neutral or impartial approach of Kabir towards both the Hindu and Muslim religions appeals to them. Kalamuddin Manshoori sheds light on humanity and impartiality in Kabir: "He talks about

humanity. He does not talk about caste and religion. How human beings should live and how they should walk, he has taught these ways. All are good. Whatever is good must be accepted. Whatever caste and class one may belong to, it is good for one to follow these messages. If his thoughts (messages) are followed, there will never be any type of enmity. All his sayings are about humanity.” Some of the Muslims often cite the following couplets in support of their claim of Kabir’s impartiality and concept of secularism:

Kankar pathar jod kar masjid liya chunaya
Ta chadi Mullah baag de kya bahira hua khudaya
(Mosque is built of brick and stone;
A Mullah from the top of the mosque starts calling for prayers as if God were deaf.)
Pahan puje hari mile to main puju pahar
Tate ye chaki bhali jaka peesa khaye sansar
(If one meets God through the worship of a stone, I will worship a mountain;
A grindmill is better than a stone statue because it provides for the whole world.)

Uttering the above couplets, Mohammad Mustafa (45 years old) from a neighbouring village of Maghar comments:

When both the things are brought together, we like such things. It means that by bringing both the things together, he (Kabir) is making us understand. He means that we are not two, rather we are one. God is just one, but we have created different identities. He is a prominent *Aulia*, prophet and *fakir*. This is the only reason that he is endowed with such things. If he had not been foresighted, he could not have achieved this.

Mustafa’s comment reflects that some Muslims accept and understand the criticism of Islam in a binary perspective. However, most of the Muslims of Maghar go beyond it and understand that Kabir criticizes the evils of both the Hindus and Muslims in order to establish and spread truth among people. Mohammad Farid (24 years old) quotes the above couplets and comments: “The most special thing of Maghar is our Kabir Das (ji) who inspired all towards the path of truth.” Abdul Mannan (66 years old) and Mehndi Hasan Ansari, who are influenced by the *vanis* of Kabir, quote the following couplet in order to highlight Kabir’s impartiality. Abdul Mannan claims that Kabir criticizes all but also respect them: “I told you that Kabir did not leave anyone uncriticised, but also gave respect to everyone.”

Kabira khada bazaar mein mange sabki khair
Na kahu se dosti na kahu se bair
(Kabir stands in the market and prays for the welfare of all;
No one is either his friend or his enemy.)

Most of the Muslims of Maghar whom I interacted with construct a friendly image of Kabir towards Islam. According to them, Kabir's iconoclasm was not anti-Islam, but antagonistic to the evils of Islam: "Kabir was never antagonistic to Islam. He was always antagonistic to evils. He was against false things and artificialities. He never attacked any religion" (Shaida Hussain Ansari). They claim that Kabir does not speak evils against Islam, rather criticizes the evils prevailed in the religion. Therefore, the Muslims of Maghar have a sense of association with Kabir. Shedding light on a friendly image of Kabir for Islam, Mehndi Hasan Ansari regards Kabir as a *Bujurg* with spiritual powers. According to him, Kabir never discriminated between the religions of Hindus and Muslims. He and many other Muslims own Kabir by addressing Kabir as "Our Kabir":

Our Kabir Saheb was a *Bujurg*. He had spiritual powers. His real name was Ahl Kabiruddin Shah. The district Sant Kabir Nagar is formed after his name. He had faith in both religions. He offered *namaz* and also performed *puja*.... He respected both and therefore, both follow him. Here ... Kabir Saheb never discriminated and considered everyone equal.

I observe that Kabir has become the part of experiences of the Muslims at Maghar. The following view of Mehndi Hasan Ansari reflects how Kabir is the part of their life: "Maghar is a very pure land where there is such a great personality! Who else may be such a dearer one than Kabir? Kabir Saheb is our heritage." I have observed that Mehndi Hasan Ansari participates in most of the activities associated with Kabir at Maghar. Receiving inspiration from Kabir, as a councillor, he equally serves both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar.

e) Muslims' Appreciation of Kabir in Respect to His *Vanis*

This section deals with the views of the Muslims of Maghar about Kabir's verses. I noted the appreciation of Kabir's verses from many Muslims of Maghar. Mohammad Aftab Alam not only appreciates Kabir's *vanis* lavishly but also finds similarity between Kabir's teachings and Islamic moral principles. According to him, Kabir's verses are philosophical:

If we look at him, his real temperament was *Sufiyana* (he had a real Sufi temperament)... the *vanis* of Baba Kabiruddin Shah were poetic. His couplets teach lessons of humanity. All religions irrespective of any community and caste ... have given priority to humanity itself.... In Islam, the same lesson has been taught that no human being should cause any pain and sorrow to others.... Kabir Das has also taught the same.... his *shayaris* (verses) and his couplets are philosophical.

Mohammad Aftab Alam further cites the following verse of Kabir with a commentary, which reflects that Kabir's universal messages appeal to Muslims:

Aisi bani boliye, man ka apa khoya
Auran ko sheetal kare apahu sheetal hoye
(Speak such words which should enchant heart;
The ones which should soothe others and you too.)

If we speak well (sweetly), most orthodox enemies will be pacified. They would also be acceptable to us, but if we speak harsh words, the weak would be like wrestlers and resist. One day, they would be annoyed. From there a quarrel will ensue. So, first of all, we should rectify our own faults.

Hasrat Ali Khan (29 years old), Mohammad Shahid Ansari and Kalim Ullah Khan (33 years old) who are teachers (lecturers) at the Sant Kabir Acharya Amrit Das Mahavidyalaya, a private degree college run by Maghar Kabir Math, claim themselves to be influenced by Kabir's *vanis* and messages of humanity. Hasrat Ali Khan claims: "If only two lines of his (Kabir's) are implemented, this world will be really changed." Kabir's verses are so dear to Mohammad Shahid Ansari that he wants to translate Kabir's verses into English. Abdul Kayum (60 years old) who has been teaching at a *madrasa* (*Jamia-Islamia*) of Maghar for 34

years is proud of Kabir, appreciates Kabir's verses and makes his students familiar with Kabir's verses and teachings:

We are proud of Kabir Saheb. Kabir Das was a very influential and great personality of his time. He inspired the whole world a lot for a communal integration. He inspired the whole world. You know his personality and his couplets yourself, which were against communalism. There are many characteristics of humanity in him. And due to these humanitarian virtues, he is very popular and is known in the whole world. Our town Maghar is situated at the *Nirvana* land of Kabir. Therefore, due to being the *Nirvana* place of Kabir (ji), it is very famous.

Said Ahmad (46 years old) claims that whatever Kabir has said is true: "I like his words. Whatever he has uttered, is very good. According to the present social environment and age, they are 100% true. They are effective because they influence everyone. If they (people) know the humanity, it is certain that they (Kabir's verses) will affect them." Saidan Ahmad Ansari (24 years old) remembers many verses of Kabir. He and his friend Mohammad Hanif (23 years old) adore Kabir's *vanis*. Saidan Ahmad Ansari says that Kabir Das was a famous saint of the *Nirguna Gyanmargiya* (mystical knowledge) sectarian tradition. He rejected *roza*, *namaz*, idol worship, *chhap tilak*. These were the artificial things for him. He admonished both of them equally. Saidan Ahmad Ansari uttered the following verses dedicated to Kabir:

Hari Janani main balak tera, kahe na awagun baksahu mera
Sut apradh kare din kete, janani ke chit rahe na tete
Kar gahi kesh kare jau ghata, tau na het utare mata
Kahe kabir ek budhi vichari, balak dukhi dukhi mahtari

[O Hari, you are my mother, I am your son, why do you not forgive my demerit.
Son commits many sins, but mother ignores them.
The son pulls away the hair of the mother, but the mother does not get angry.
Kabir says, think and contemplate, when the son is sad and so is the mother.]

Kalimulla (60 years old) likes the words of Kabir and finds in them the welfare of people: "I really like the words of Kabir. Whatever he has said, in reality, gives direction to society. If society follows this path even to a little extent, there will be all goodness and welfare in that." Aftab Alam Ansari (24 years old) expresses his attachment to Kabir's *vanis*

and claims to be influenced by his personality: “I like the words of Kabir very much. He never committed any wrong deeds nor did utter any wrong words... Whatever has been uttered by him is correct. I like his words very much. I like whatever has been done and uttered by him. His personality affects me much.”

Mohammad Tariq (50 years old) recites a number of Kabir’s couplets in the appreciation of Kabir. Citing the following couplet, he says that people follow him for his goodness. The entire world surrenders itself to his feet. There is a comfort over here and he has shown the path of goodness. What else do we need?

Pothi padh padh jag mua, pandit bhaya na koya
Aa dhai akshar prem ka padhe so pandit hoye
(Reading books, the world dies, but none becomes wise.
One who understands the meaning of love becomes wise.)

Thus, I interacted with a number of Muslims of Maghar who appreciated Kabir’s *vanis* and his messages. They welcomed the verses of Kabir and his criticism on the negative elements (evils) prevailing in Islam. However, Ahmad Allah Ansari and Gulam Kibriya Ansari (78 years old), the two orthodox Muslims, reacted to the following couplet of Kabir and corrected him though they remembered and cited many couplets of Kabir. At some points, they also appreciated Kabir. Ahmad Allah Ansari argues:

Whatever couplets and quatrains are there in the name of Kabir in writing and print, all are correct, but there is one which he has spoken about the Muslims:

Kankar patthar jori ke masjid liya banaya
Ta chadi mullah baag de kya bahara hua khudaya

The Muslims will certainly reject it. This *baag (azan)*³²⁴ which is given, is an announcement of the time for *namaz*. It is better than calling people from one house to another. This was also in trend during the time of the prophet. It would be heard from the mosque and Muslim people would come. This is performed for the same purpose. The one who gives *azan* (address) does not address God.... According to it, this couplet proves to be incorrect.

³²⁴ A call for prayer (*namaz*) from mosque.

It reflects an ideological pain or grudge of the orthodox Muslims, stimulated by the couplet of Kabir. However, many Muslims of Maghar are in favour of Kabir in the context of this couplet. Supporting Kabir, Shaida Hussain Ansari explicates that Kabir has spoken the truth and he is correct:

Prayer is performed in privacy. When the world sleeps, you should wake up. You should not make the show of that. He uttered such things to attack the corrupt practices and there is nothing else. As far as his *vanis* are concerned, whether they are seen according to the Hindu *Dharma Shastra* or according to our Islam, they never prove to be wrong. Therefore, both people (Hindus and Muslims) have faith in Kabir in their own ways. I follow him according to the Islamic way.

According to him, the *vanis* of Kabir are a revolutionary. Mehndi Hasan Ansari also explains that no Muslim objects to Kabir for this couplet. Reacting to the following couplet, he says:

No Muslim from our town objects. In our town, the Hindus and Muslims are brothers. I never evidenced any such thing. Whether there are Hindus or Muslims, all always have faith in Baba Kabir Saheb. They visit both the mosque and temple.... I like his *bhajans*. I remember his couplet.

Kabira khada bazaar mein sabki mange khair
Na koi se dosti na koi se bair

(Kabir stands in the market and prays for the welfare of all;
No one is either a friend or an enemy.)

He further explains that there have always been such *vanis* of Kabir Saheb which have always made friends for him. He had no enmity with any one; Kabir Saheb has always given the message of humanity.

The Muslims of Maghar also transmit Kabir's messages and stories from one generation to the next generation. I found many Muslims accepting the fact that the teachings of Kabir have been told to them by their elders. Shamshad Alam (70 years old) testifies to this fact:

I like Kabir Saheb's way of living. Whatever our ancestors have told about the manner of his living and about his goodness show that he was a noble man.

My ancestors told me. I agree with them. I follow his personality. He was a good human being. According to our religion, he is a *Wali*. It is propitious to visit his *Mazar*.

I find Maghar's milieu so intermeshed with Kabir culture that there will remain a continuity of Muslims' devotion or faith in Kabir and they will continue to be exposed to Kabir's teachings, verses, stories (legends), and the traditions of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* and Kabir's shrines such as *Khichadi Mela* (it will be studied in detail in the next section), *Urs*, Kabir Nirvana Divas etc.

II

Maghar's Kabir: An Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity

No scholarly attention has been paid to exploring how Kabir is seen by people in the oral tradition in the context of Hindu-Muslim unity. During the course of my fieldwork at Maghar, I found that Kabir is seen as an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. In fact, Kabir is at the centre of their relationship. Kabir can be seen to have influenced the social, political, cultural and religious life of the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar bringing them together. As a result, there has developed a syncretic culture. This section explores how Kabir brings both the communities of Maghar together and how he influences their social, political, cultural and religious landscapes developing a shared culture between them.

Kabir's Iconoclasm Understood as an Attempt to Unite Hindus and Muslims

Kabir was an iconoclastic Indian saint-poet of 15th-16th century. He is famous for his tirade against the orthodox Brahmanical and Islamic practices, artificialities, hypocrisies and superstitions. He chided both the Hindus and Muslims for fighting in the name of temple and mosque, Ram and Rahim (*Allah/Khuda*) and for a false sense of superiority of their respective religious beliefs and symbols. The following verse of Kabir testifies to this fact:

*Kabir hindu muye ram kahi, musalman khudai
Kahai kabir so jeevata, duh mein kade na jai* (Gupta, 1969, p. 92)
(Kabir says, Hindu passes away uttering Ram while Musalman Khuda;
Only those who never fall prey to either of them survive.)

This criticism of Kabir is understood, especially by the common people as his endeavour to unite Hindus and Muslims. However, scholars give two different perceptions of Kabir towards the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. As per the first perception which most scholars support, Kabir worked for the unity of Hindus and Muslims while as per the second perception, Kabir's purpose was not to work for their unity, rather he criticized the evils of both religions which he saw an obstacle to the path of humanity and he never cared for the pleasure and displeasure of Hindus and Muslims.

Ayodhyasingh Upadhyay (1916, p. 51) points out that "Kabir Saheb had wanted to lay the foundation of such a religion which the people of both the communities could embrace without any hesitation." He further says that he was more inclined towards the unity of the Hindus and Muslims than other things because he did not like any conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Shyam Sundar Das (1928) also comments that "the soul of Kabir" aspired to unite Hindus and Muslims and adds, "His aim had always been the unity of Hindus and Muslims" (p. 26). In his essay "Kabirpanth and its Social Content", R. K. Khandeval (1978) also notes: "His message paved the way for Hindu-Muslim unity" (p. 83). Peter Gaeffke (2002, p. 160) elucidates that [Kabir] "wanted to let his reader know about his cultural and metaphysical teachings and his opposition to pride and heresy; and that Kabir spread justice and truth and wished to unite Hindus and Muslims." Muhammad Hedayetullah (2009) highlights Kabir as the apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. In his *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity* itself, Hedayetullah writes: "Kabir's greatness lies primarily in his sustained efforts to unite the Hindus and Muslims who had been antagonistic to one another for centuries" (p. xx).

On the other hand, Ramchandra Shukla (1929) holds that Kabir did not try to unite the Hindus and Muslims, rather tried to show that God is One or Ram and Rahim are one: “Kabir criticized both Brahmin priests and Mullahs who focused on externalities of worship and gave prominence to rituals and he preached to purify hearts and instil love in them by making them (Hindus and Muslims) understand the unity of Ram-Rahim” (p. 43). Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (2005, p. 285) comments: “Kabir’s path was straightforward. He was not the one who harmonized by bowing down to both. He was a revolutionary who destroyed all the snares of eternal *acar* [*achar*] and bad concepts. Compromise was not his path.” Dwivedi (2014) further adds:

Those who are the supporters of the Hindu-Muslim unity regard Kabir as their guide. It is fine. The unity of Ram-Rahim and Keshav-Karim is self-evident/self-proved. The people with a communal bent of mind fail in understanding this unity. No one has propagated the message of the unity in more profound words than Kabir. However, those who regard Kabir only as a prophet of the Hindu-Muslim unity on account of their profuse enthusiasm, begin to emphasize only one characteristic forgetting his real approach. If such people are annoyed to find that Kabir nowhere tried to establish harmony between the high cultures of both religions or higher sensibilities of both the religions and moreover, he derided all those religious characteristics, which the religious leaders interpret as superior religious codes, it is not astonishing because Kabir deliberately ignores the religious conflicts from this point of view. (p. 172)

The view of Dwivedi reflects that Kabir emphasizes on the basic common elements between Hindus and Muslims (which they have been ignorant of) in place of uniting them. It further suggests that Hindus and Muslims can be united, but this unity must have a scope for criticisms of flaws in both the religions. Both Hindus and Muslims must be ready to accept these criticisms. Agrawal (2009) also rejects the claim that Kabir was a supporter of unity between Hindus and Muslims. Like Dwivedi, he points out: “There are many people who find Kabir’s poems useful for the unity of Hindus and Muslims. In the present context, the unity of Hindus and Muslims or the unity of any communities means that there should be made no criticism of the superstitions and evil practices of any religious tradition. Kabir did not want

such type of unity.” In his thesis “Images of Kabir: As Described by Yadav in Assi and Nagwa, and Julaha in Shivala and Saket Nagar”, Kristian Niemi writes: “Rather than trying to harmonize the two communities of Hindu and Muslim, Kabir rejected both” (p. 42).

However, no scholarly attention has been paid to discovering how Kabir is seen by ordinary Hindus and Muslims in the oral tradition in the context of unity. During the course of my fieldwork at Maghar from 2016 to 2022, I found that both the Hindus and Muslims perceive him as a propagator of unity between them. They perceive Kabir in this way because they themselves have fostered their peaceful mutual relationship through the messages, teachings and influences of Kabir. This section focuses on this phenomenon and highlights a syncretic³²⁵ relationship between the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar developed through Kabir.

I reached Maghar³²⁶ for the first time in October 2016 and I was profoundly attracted to a monument named ‘Sant Kabir Dwar’ erected at the main entrance road of Maghar. This monument has an inscription giving a significant hint about the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims and also about their connection with Kabir. The inscription has the names of the then chairman and councillors of Maghar Nagar Panchayat: Ashwini Kumar Gupta, Abrar Alam, Shrimati Ijasi Devi, Shahid Parvej, Sangeeta Varma, Gaurav Kumar Pinkal, Awadesh Kumar Singh, Jagat Narayan Singh, Sayida Khatoon, Lalchand Yadav, Humera Khatoon, Rabiya Khatoon, Kalamuddin Khan (Babloo Singh), Archana Singh. These

³²⁵ Syncretism refers to a blending of diverse of faiths, cultures and customs. Imtiaz Ahmad points out: “The term ‘syncretic’ is not clearly defined, but one could see it in the widest possible sense as a term that aims to describe religious communities who have assimilated rituals or concepts from other religious communities” (p. 257).

³²⁶ In 1991-92, Maghar became a Nagar Panchayat (a Notified Area Council) consisting of 13 wards. According to the 2011 Census of India, there are 53.73% Muslims and 46.01% Hindus in Maghar. According to Khadim Hussain Ansari (the *Mutvalli* of the *Mazar*), the Muslim castes include Ansari Muslims, Khan Muslims, , Qureshi Muslims, Manshoori Muslims, Manihar (Churihar/Siddiqui) Muslims, Patahara Muslims, Darzi Muslims (Idrisi), Barber Muslims. Among these Muslims, the Ansari Muslims occupies the 80% Muslim population. The Hindu castes include Nishad, Chamar, Gupta, Teli, Varma, Yadava, Pasi (Dusadh), Kurmi, Chauhan, Dhobi (Washerman), Kurmi, Vishwakarma, Srivastava, Brahmin and Thakur. Nishad, Gupta, Chamar and Varma form the majority of the Hindu population.

mixed names of the Hindus and Muslims give the first impression of a syncretic relationship between them and suggest their coexistence in Maghar.



Figure 43: Kabir Dwar (Gate) at the entrance of Maghar town

The central part of Maghar which suggests a stronger syncretic relationship between the Hindus and Muslims is the large campus of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*. During my first fieldwork at Maghar, I observed the daily activities of the people on the campus of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* and discovered that the campus of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* consisting of Kabir's Hindu *Samadhi*, Kabir's Muslim *Mazar*, Kabir's cave, Lord Shiva Temple, Mosque and banks of the Ami river is an important source of interaction between Hindus and Muslims of Maghar. It has been the only common ground or place of promenade for both. The Hindus and Muslims of Maghar regularly share it equally. As Kabir's shrines, Muslims' mosque and Hindus' Shiva temple are together on the campus of the *Nirvana Sthali* of Kabir, the Hindus of the Maghar can be seen in the company of the Muslims and vice-versa.



Figure 44: Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* and its components

Hindus and Muslims also regularly share the campuses of the mosque and Lord Shiva, but not with the religious purpose. Since both are situated beside the banks of the Ami river,³²⁷ they become more public places where the people sit, take rest and interact with one another.

³²⁷ I also discovered many Hindus and Muslims giving a reference to the Ami river for regular interactions between the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar. However, a popular legend of Kabir is an integral part of this reference. The legend goes as follows: the Ami river flowed one kilometre away to the east of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*. He had to go to the river to take water for his daily routine. One day he asked the river to flow by his cottage. The Ami changed the course of her flow immediately and began to flow by the cottage of Kabir. Generally, the people of Maghar perceive this legend as a true story of Kabir. Mohammad Tariq states: “He has turned the Amiya (Ami) river here. Offering *Saheb Bandagi* to it, he turned Amiya and brought it here. Our *Saheb* turned it.” Some also believe that Kabir took a small wood of the mango tree and turned the river into this shape (it has already been discussed in the second chapter) with the wood and brought it near his cottage.

When the river passed by the cottage of Kabir, here the *ghats* were developed for the Hindus and Muslims. There are four or five adjacent *ghats* here. On these *ghats*, both the Hindus and Muslims bathed and took water for their daily uses. A *bauli* was also made for the Muslims. The Muslims used its water for *voju* (washing their hands before reading *namaz* at the mosque which is just before it.)

The Hindus and Muslims continued bathing and washing at the *ghats* of the river up to 1980s as the river was the main source of water for the people of Maghar. From the early morning to 9 am every day, there used to gather a huge crowd of both the communities at the *ghats* of the river. Both not only cared for the comfort and convenience of each other, but they also remained tolerant of each other.

Besides bathing and washing, the people of Maghar also used the water of the river for cooking their meals. They drank the water of the river. This river was really a strong medium to connect both the Hindus and Muslims. We should listen to the people of Maghar themselves how it contributed to the integrity of Maghar. Looking at the river as a source of unity between the Hindus and Muslims, Kalimulla states:



Figure 45: Hindus and Muslims of Maghar on the *Ghat* of the Ami river

On the occasion of *Eid* in 2019, I found two dozen Muslims sitting there and also some on the platform of the temple. Javed Ahmad who is often invited to cook meals in the *bhandaras* associated with Maghar Kabir Math, was sitting on the *chabutara* (platform) of the temple. His following view highlights Maghar’s mixed culture:

In childhood, there was somewhat more (unity). Then, one of the reasons was also the river. It was very good and clean. So, in the morning, all came here to bathe and walk. There is also one thing, at that time there was no much pressure of livelihood and the people came and do the exercise etc. here in the morning and evening. The beauty of the relationship between both the communities reflected here.

Jawaharlal Gupta (70 years old) also talks about the contribution of the river and associates it with Kabir: “When we were small, there was no hand pump. There were only empty wells. And this was the river. All the people bathed here. They (Muslims) bathed in the *bauliya* (a small pond) and also here. Kabir gives an evidence of unity. All are walking on his *vanis*. Here, the people are very nice and therefore, the people are very good here.”

From 1987 onwards, use of the water of the Ami river by the people started declining. In 1992, Maghar was made a notified area. Since then there has been a proper arrangement of water and other facilities in the name of Kabir. One of the main reasons of not using the water of the river was also its polluted water. The paper mill established at Khalilabad dumped its dirty water into Ami river. As a result, the people of Maghar left its use. They struggled hard to stop the dumped water of the paper mill. For the last two years, the dumped water was prohibited from letting it fall into the river. As a result, the banks of the river at Maghar are again populated in the morning and evening. Though they do not generally bathe in the river, the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar regularly sit near the banks and interact with one another.



Figure 46: Muslims of Maghar at the Shiva Temple on the occasion of Eid 2019

Here, there is a great atmosphere of peace. Maghar is the symbol of peace and harmony. You can see here; you can make a guess here. You see that all men (Muslims) have offered *namaz* in the mosque; now, see in front of you, there are many Muslims on the campus of the *Shivalaya*. The Hindus and Muslims all are one. There is a culture of the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*. After coming here, people feel blessed. This land of Kabir Saheb has great regards. All the Hindus and Muslims have a strong unity. There has never happened such a thing (riot/conflict).



Figure 47: Javed Ahmad on the *Chabutara* of the Shiva Temple

It is interesting to note that all relics on the campus of Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* appear to equally belong to both the Hindus and Muslims. They work as a medium of interaction between the Hindus and Muslims³²⁸. While interacting with both the Hindus and Muslims, I found Kabir at the very centre of their *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb*³²⁹. Both the Hindus and Muslims strongly believe that Kabir wanted them to live together with peace, love and affection. This belief or faith has developed a strong shared culture in Maghar. Ram Shankar Yadav (70 years old) holds that Kabir wanted the Hindus and the Muslims to live together in peace and brotherhood. Mehndi Hasan Ansari, a councillor of Maghar, gives the same view: “When Kabir Saheb came to Maghar, he made the people of both the communities understand that God is one and you should follow one. You should live together with harmony.... The people of both the communities understand that they should live in this way.” The view of Mehndi Hasan reflects his understanding and familiarity with the truth “Allah/Rahim and God or Ram is one”, one of the main messages conveyed by Kabir.

³²⁸ One can even see interactions between the *saguna* (Lord Shiva) and *Nirguna* traditions (Kabir’s shrines and Muslim mosque) at the Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*.

³²⁹ *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* literally means *Ganga Jamuni* culture. It denotes a syncretic fusion of Hindu cultural elements with Muslim religious elements. It reflects the communal harmony and a shared culture between the Hindus and Muslims. It also shows a peaceful merging of Hindu and Muslim culture and life style as expressed in their friendship, joint festivities and interdependence. *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* is particularly used for a syncretic culture between Hindus and Muslims in North India. In *The Politics of Secularism: Medieval Indian Historiography*, Venkat Dhulipala notes: “The composite culture of northern India, known as the Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb was a product of the interaction between Hindu society and Islam” (p. 27).

TogetherNESS of Kabir *Mazar* and Kabir *Samadhi*: A Reflection of the Hindu-Muslim Relationship in Maghar



Figure 48: Hindus and Muslims visiting Kabir *Mazar* and Kabir *Samadhi*

What really influences and attracts Hindus and Muslims towards Kabir is the coexistence of his *Mazar* and *Samadhi* and also a peaceful relationship at both the places. There is, according to both the Muslims and Hindus, no discrimination at these shrines. Therefore, they feel happy and connected with both the places and monuments of Kabir. Such an ambience also enriches Muslims' affection to Kabir. Mohammad Rayis points out:

We walk across the *Mazar* and the temple. Have you seen Kabir Chaura (Maghar Kabir *Math*)? I would like to invite you to go and see once. It is a very beautiful place. We (Muslims) go inside the *Mazar* and *Samadhi*. We have no problem at all. They (Hindus) never prevent us nor do we prevent them. Brother, when both the things are one, no one can understand whether Kabir Saheb was a Hindu or Muslim.

The coexistence of these shrines really lays a great impact on the psyche of both the Hindus and Muslims³³⁰. The Hindus and Muslims take lessons of the *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* from the togetherness of the *Samadhi* and *Mazar*. It is their realization or impression that when both the monuments belong to Kabir, they (both the monuments) are one. Similarly, they (Hindus and Muslims) are one in Maghar. In fact, these monuments represent the Hindu-Muslim cultures interacting with each other. In other words, symbolically, the togetherness of both represents the actual relationship between the Hindus and Muslims in Maghar town itself³³¹. The people of Maghar often cite the co-existence of the *Mazar* and *Samadhi* to

³³⁰ It is to be noted that when, in many parts of the country, the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims is becoming bitter, here the coexistence of Kabir's cenotaphs has been pacifying and directing their relationship at Maghar. Till 1992, there used to be a huge wall between Kabir's *Mazar* and *Samadhi* temple. Keay (1931) also mentions this wall. It is guessed that this wall was erected due to some dispute happened long ago between the Muslims and the Hindus, especially the Kabirpanthi Hindus. It was a dividing wall between not only two shrines but also two communities. In 1992, this wall was demolished so that the people of both the communities could go across and visit these places without any hindrance, and both the monuments could unite the people. Both the Hindus and Muslims welcomed this demolition and in fact, it brought happiness to them. Ironically, at the same time in Ayodhya, the Babri Mosque was demolished. It is interesting to note that at Maghar, when Kabir was becoming the part of both the communities through the demolition of the wall, Lord Ram, the son of King Dashrath who is said to have been born in Ayodhya was being made a deity of just one community (Hindu) through the demolition of the mosque. Perhaps, it was the reason that Kabir might have not chosen Ram of Ayodhya for his *bhakti*, but the Almighty God Who is of all.

During the demolition of the Babri Mosque, there was an atmosphere of terror in many parts of the country, especially in those parts where Hindus and Muslims coexist. Richard M. Eaton writes: "India was severely shaken in December 1992 when religious activists demolished the Babri Masjid of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, built in 1528 by the first Mughal emperor" (p. 1). It is interesting to note the situation of Maghar at that time. Awadesh Singh (55 years old), a member of the only Singh family of Maghar, highlights the atmosphere of Maghar during the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992:

Let me tell you one more thing. When there was the conflict of Babri Mosque and *Ramjanm Bhoomi*, There was a tense situation in the whole country. Even at that time, there was no such conflict in our town. There was a peaceful situation. Here, there was the state that if the police were patrolling and a Hindu boy was walking on the road, he entered the house of a Muslim. If a Muslim boy was walking, he entered the house of a Hindu. The people tried to protect each other.... This was the situation over here.

Gayauddin (45 years old) also gives a similar view about the time of 1992 in Maghar: "The comfort that is found in Maghar is nowhere in the world.... There is a great deal of peace here. You must have seen the matter of Babri Mosque in 1992. Due to this controversy, something or other happened everywhere, but it had no impact on Maghar. All lived with great comfort. There was complete faith in (Kabir)".

³³¹ What may surprise one most in Maghar is the geographical location of the dwelling places of both the Hindus and Muslims. As Kabir *Mazar* and Kabir *Samadhi* are situated beside each other, a similar kind of the geographical location of the Hindus and Muslims is found in most parts of Maghar. The Muslims are the neighbours of the Hindus and vice versa. Out of the thirteen wards of Maghar, Sherpur and Islam Nagar are mostly Muslim populated. However, broadly speaking, there is the mixed population of the Hindus and Muslims in all the wards of Maghar. This geographical location has played a great role in developing a shared or syncretic relationship between the Hindus and Muslims. The people of Maghar consider this geographical location a natural gift. They also believe it to be the result of Kabir's presence here. Commenting on the geographical location of Maghar, Haji Mohammad Rafiq says:

See, the fact of the matter is that here there is no borderline of ours. If there are two houses of the Harijan, there are six houses of the Ansari. There are four houses of the Bania and there

describe and define their mutual relationship in Maghar. It is to be noted that there is a striking parallelism between the views of both the Hindus and Muslims. Mehndi Hasan Ansari says: “On the one hand, there is the *Mazar* and on the other hand there is his *Samadhi*. Here there is no division; all live here together. They visit both.” Siraj Ahmad (45 years old) also gives a similar opinion:

I have gone across the *Samadhi* and the *Mazar* several times. There is no discrimination. There is nothing like (discrimination)... You can see that on the one hand, there is a mosque and on the other hand, there is a temple. On

are four houses of the Khan. Thus, the houses, streets, doors, front parts, back parts are adjacent. No one is separated anywhere.... It is a natural gift. If someone wants to divide it, no one can divide.

There are a couple of Mohallas and wards where the population of one community is certainly greater. However, the important thing is that the people (who are few in those Mohallas and wards) do not feel any sense of isolation between the Hindus and Muslims. They celebrate their neighbourhood with one another as if they are two brothers of the same family. They share their happy and sad moments with each other. Mehndi Hasan shares his experiences and considers the togetherness of both a blessing of Kabir:

This is all the blessing of Baba Kabir Saheb. There has always been the blessing of Kabir Saheb. If you go inside the town, there is the house of a Hindu beside the house of a Muslim and vice versa.... It never happened that the Hindus and Muslims were differentiated.... I also live in the Mohalla Kajipur and there are the Hindu brothers living around me. I am a Muslim, but I have never realized whether I am a Hindu or a Muslim. It has never happened so. I go to their houses and they come to my house. I eat in their pots and they eat in my pots. I never felt any difference. We should always do so. The message of the humanity must be transmitted. There should always be humanity. There is one song of Mohammad Rafi Saheb (which inspires us to become true human beings):

Na ham hindu banenge, na musalman banenge

Ham insan ki aulad hain ham insan banenge

(We shall become neither Hindus nor Muslims.)

We are the progenies of human beings, we shall become human beings.)

Not only Mehndi Hasan but also many others consider it the blessings of Kabir Das. Due to their co-existence, interaction between them in religious and social spheres is frequent. They find themselves attached to each other. Misbahul Jamal comprehensively describes it:

There is definitely a mutual brotherhood.... Here the population is also mixed. The population of both the Hindus and Muslims is mixed and therefore, they are attached to each other. There is no difference even in conversation and behaviour. You will not find out who the Hindus are and who the Muslims are. There are differences in languages, but here there are no differences. Both share the same one. You should take it as the benediction of Kabir Das. He loved both the Hindus and Muslims. His benediction is on both the Hindus and Muslims.... Up to now, there has been no mutiny.

Haji Mohammad Rafiq gives a similar view:

Here the Hindus and Muslims live together. Whether there is the work of the Hindus or Muslims, without including each other, it is not possible to be accomplished. Marriage, happiness and sadness of both all happen together. Right now, I do not have that (invitation card). There is one of our leaders from BJP. His father passed away. Probably on 11 January 2017, I have been invited. I will go to him and take food there. It is the matter of affection.

Coincidentally, I also happened to be there and found the people of both the communities together. I participated in the *shraaddha* of the Hindu leader and there I saw more Muslim population than the Hindu one. According to Jagdish Tiwari (74 years old), it is on account of their mutual intimacy: “All participate in the functions of each other. They cooperate with each other. In every way, there is love, affection and brotherhood. Here you will never find any communal riots. Here there is a very loving and friendly environment”.

the one hand, there is a *Mazar* and on the other hand, there is a *Samadhi*. When he (Kabir) himself did not make any discrimination, how would any discrimination be here (in Maghar)? I mean to say that here there is an environment of complete peace.

Jawaharlal Gupta gives credit to Kabir for this togetherness and peaceful relationship of the Hindus and Muslims. He brings out the context of co-existence of both the monuments in order to highlight the actual relationship of the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar:

See, the buildings are made together; this is of the Hindus, that is of the Muslims. All have faith in Kabir. There are many Muslims here, but there is still so much love. No one can know whether they are the Hindus or Muslims.... However, there are more Muslims now. There are more Muslims than the Hindus, but there is no lack of love. No fight ever takes place. This is all the contribution of Kabir Saheb.

Kamlesh Kumar Gupta (42 years old) claims that the arrival of Kabir has brought unity between the Hindus and Muslims, which is represented by the togetherness of the *Mazar* and *Samadhi*:

Here, the mutual relationship is very sound. There is co-operation. I hold faith in Kabir because after his arrival here, there is a communal unity. Mutual harmony is everything and it is maintained here. Go there and see yourself, there is no wall. Whether you go to the *Mazar* or *Samadhi*, there is no discrimination. Anyone can come and go. The Hindus go to the Muslims and vice-versa.

Pradeep Kumar Pasvan (Dusadh) [28 years old], who runs a photo studio with the name of “Kabir Photo Studio”, says that in Maghar the Hindus and Muslims live like brothers. By giving the example of the togetherness of Kabir *Samadhi*, *Mazar* and other monuments, he asserts:

It is very good here. Here, both the Hindus and Muslims live like brothers, and here you can see that, for example, there is our Kabir *Math*. Beside it, there is a mosque also and there is a *Mazar* of Kabir Das. There is a temple in the middle. The Muslims have also faith in (Kabir). In the early morning, women also go there to walk and they perform *parikarma* (circumambulation). The people of Muslim caste go there and so do the people of the Hindu caste.

Virendra Kumar Yadav (50 years old), a teacher from Sant Kabir Bilas Inter College, also gives a similar opinion. According to him, the togetherness of both the monuments indicates a harmonious relationship between the Hindus and Muslims themselves:

Here you will find yourself that there is a *Mazar* in the name of Kabir and there is also a temple. It suggests itself that the people live with great goodwill. Here, great comfort is experienced.... There is a strong harmony here. Seeing them (*Mazar* and *Samadhi*), we ourselves feel that here there are both types of people, but there is no type of discrimination. If you go to the *Math*, you will see yourself. You also feel that there are a temple and a *Mazar* beside each other ... there is no such thing. Here there have been no riots. It is a very good thing in itself.

We can clearly see that the togetherness of the *Mazar* and *Samadhi* of Kabir directs and nurture the mutual relationship of the Hindus and Muslims in Maghar. One may have the first impression that Kabir is divided into two folds which are represented by these monuments. However, let me disclose the fact that these two monuments, in fact, bind the Hindus and Muslims together with love and affection and we have already seen its reflection in the above views of the Hindus and Muslims.

Impact of Kabir's Social Message on Maghar

Kabir's impact on Maghar can be seen in many ways. Its people take lessons from Kabir and implement them in their lives. They use Kabir in order to avoid any kind of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims. As a result, they have an attitude of tolerance to each other in every aspect of life. Both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar believe that the peace and communal harmony in Maghar is the contribution of Kabir. They claim that they are living a happy and peaceful life due to Kabir and acknowledge his importance in their lives. I often hear them saying that it is the land of Kabir and they must not let it be blotted. They perceive Kabir as an inspiration for directing and guiding life. Mohammad Asad (40 years old) claims: "See, Kabir (ji) has a strong impact on our Maghar. Its example is that when two brothers (whether they are real brothers or they are Hindus and Muslims or

whatever) quarrel, — sometimes it so happens that their quarrel leads to a situation of near communal riot —, people pacify the situation by invoking Kabir.”

The people of Maghar have been trying to preserve the heritage of unity developed through Kabir and of what he did for increasing the glory of Maghar. Mohammad Asad highlights this fact. I have also had the same observation about the entire Maghar:

The people of Maghar want that when guests come to Maghar, we should not show our weakness and flaws before them because Kabir gave up his life in order to remove the prejudice that if one dies here, one will be a donkey. Kabir Saheb came to Maghar to repudiate this prejudice and remove its shortcomings. We also want that until we live, there should be no complaint.... The residents of Maghar know Kabir Saheb. We cite the same example when we go outside. We have been walking on the path shown by him from time immemorial. We have been following his ways. Due to this, we do not fight and quarrel. No fight takes place. We give examples and the other persons accept and follow them. Both come close to each other.

Mehndi Hasan Ansari also points out the same fact and sheds light on the significance of Kabir for Maghar:

When something happens, the people of all the communities assemble at once. Having assembled, they search for the solution of the problem or resolve the problem because they want that here no serious controversy should break out. Here we all live together. Baba Kabir Saheb whom our prestige is associated with is lying here. The people from far off places come here. If any controversy breaks out in the town or anything negative happens, its reputation will be besmirched. We would be ashamed of showing our face to people. We all try that the peace that is maintained in this town should remain in the same manner forever.... We have to follow Kabir. If we have to be good, we have to adopt Kabir Saheb. If we follow his ideologies, we ourselves are Kabir. Our *Baba* Kabir Saheb has, therefore, taught us. The symbol of peace and comfort that is transmitted from here is the gift of only *Baba*. We take fresh breath only because of *Baba*. We cannot manage this town ourselves. It is *Baba* who himself has preserved this town.

Kamrul Islam (32 years old) also finds Kabir a source of unity between the Hindus and Muslims, but he also sheds light on the political interference as a danger for this unity (this aspect will be discussed in detail below):

He (Kabir) was a good man. He spoke the truth and advised that we should have brotherhood and love between each other ... it is only because of him

that the Hindus and Muslims live together. There has been a great contribution of Kabir to developing the unity of the Hindus and Muslims. But the leaders have interfered in it. In spite of this, everything is all right. There is no problem here.

It is to be noted that the Hindus of Maghar also give a similar view. Santosh Kumar Yadav (35 years old) says: “If something goes wrong or a conflict takes place, who will be at fault? Kabir has given his message here for a social reform. It is the blessing of Kabir that no riot takes place here.” Ram Shankar Yadav whom I interviewed on the bank of the Ami river holds Kabir responsible for peace in Maghar. He exemplifies the Hindus and Muslims sitting at the *ghat* of the Ami river together in order to highlight the mixed culture of Maghar. However, he also finds elections vulnerable for the integrity of Maghar³³²:

This all is the contribution of Kabir Saheb. All this is possible through his culture. The people follow him. Here there is love, sympathy and pity. The people do not want more than that. Here both the Hindus and Muslims follow Kabir. He came here and he is still here. Even today in this region, there are the followers of Kabir Saheb. It is good that those followers are complementary to each other. In Maghar, there would be 60% Muslims and 40% Hindus. All live together. The election is a different thing. Election does take place here. After the election, all the people walk on one pattern. Now you can see from one side to another, there are the Muslims. On that side there is our Kalamuddin Bhai; there is Sheikh Ali and here there is the Azad Bhai. You can see that there are many. Both drink water on the same *ghat*. It was what Kabir Saheb wanted. He wished that both should drink water on the same bank. They should be complimentary to each other. The Hindus and Muslims are complimentary to each other in Maghar. His (Kabir’s) influence also reflects in behaviour. The people follow the message of Kabir Saheb.

³³² The present politics and media have certainly created a rift between the Hindus and Muslims in many parts of the country. Due to the political interventions and Media’s highlighting Hindus and Muslims as rival groups are rapidly compartmentalizing both the religions attacking shared culture between them. Imtiaz Ahmad notes that bureaucrats, politicians and educated people all have stimulated the process of compartmentalizing:

For bureaucrats, politicians as well as a new generation of educated people taught to believe that Hindus and Muslims are two completely separate and well-defined communities, Islam and Hinduism being seen as completely unrelated and neatly bounded bodies of knowledge and forms of ritual practice, shared religious identities are a direct challenge to their ways of seeing the world. Consequently, local communities and traditions that had earlier comfortably existed in a situation of liminality are increasingly forced to identify themselves as either Hindu or Muslim. Outside political interests ... further add to this pressure. (p. 184)

However, the sensible Hindus and Muslims of Maghar have protected themselves from this rift through the inspiration of Kabir.

Jagdish Tiwari holds that there has been unity between the Hindus and Muslims since Kabir came to Maghar. According to him, the arrival of Kabir at Maghar inspired the Hindus and Muslims to live together:

Kabir Saheb has given a great contribution to Maghar. When Kabir Saheb came here, both the Hindus and Muslims were not united. There were jealousy, enmity, quarrel prevailing here. After coming here, he has done a great deed of welfare ... here both the Hindus and Muslims live together in a similar way. It happened after Kabir came here. It happened that love between them increased. It is the contribution of Kabir that there is love between the Hindus and Muslims.

I myself have observed that the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar follow and implement Kabir's messages in order to preserve the peaceful environment of Maghar and live together.

Kabir's Divine Impact on Maghar

The Hindus and Muslims also believe that the spiritual power of Kabir always protects Maghar from controversies and disasters. Mohammad Aftab Alam perceives Kabir as a *fakir* whose presence ensures the welfare of the entire Maghar³³³. He believes that due to the presence of Kabir, no disaster or riot occurs to Maghar:

Maghar is a unique place in the world. It is the place of the *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb*, which is inspiring the whole world. A poet has spoken about it:

³³³ Both Hindus and Muslims equally believe that it is because of Kabir that all the infrastructural developments have taken place at Maghar. According to Mohammad Farid, Kabir had come for the welfare of Maghar and due to Kabir, Maghar is progressing: "I know only this that Kabir resides here. Kabir had come for Maghar and for us in the same era and he did our welfare. Today, only in his name, Maghar is heading towards development. This is his contribution." In the words of Mehndi Hasan Ansari:

Here development is in progress. It is the gift of Baba Kabir Saheb that all types of development are being made here. Due to the presence of Baba Kabir Saheb, whichever the government is here pays attention to its development. Whether it is the state government or the central government, it necessarily gives attention to the development of Maghar. We have the blessings of Kabir on us. There is his blessing that we live and work here. We always help each other.

This development also associates the Muslims with Kabir. The views of Mehndi Hasan Ansari and Mohammad Farid testify to the same fact.

Since all the political parties perceive Maghar as a great centre for seeking Hindu and Muslim votes, their leaders continue visiting this centre. In this process, Maghar has also received a huge advantage as these leaders, especially the leaders of the current government give grants for its development in the name of Kabir.

*Nadi kinare koi rahgeer sota hain
Jamana jagta hain aur fakir sota hain
Yahan sulagta harshu khulus ka lohbaan
Vo yah dayar hain jahan kabir sota hain*
[A passer-by sleeps on the bank of the river.
The world wakes up and a *fakir* sleeps.
Here smoulders the olibanum of happiness and prosperity.
That is the place where Kabir sleeps.]

‘*Jamana jab jagata hai to fakir sota hain*’— if there is a *fakir* in a region spreading over around four miles, no riots ever take place there. There would be peace and prosperity. There will not take place any riot. Such mishaps did not happen even earlier. Only the divine disasters would come. If there is one *darvesh* or *fakir*, he is a protector of the people of around the four miles. There is no such thing. There is an example of Maghar that here there have been no crimes and measles. No such disasters have ever come. Ask anyone and read the history. The history is evidence. One who is a *darvesh* or *fakir* protects all the persons and wealth. There is such power in his blessings that sitting here, he can see everything.

The view of Mohammad Aftab Alam reflects that the Muslims of Maghar perceive Kabir as a prominent Sufi saint having great spiritual powers. They have been influenced by Kabir’s spiritual powers which they have heard through his legends and stories or have realized themselves. Shaida Hussain Ansari says that he was certainly a boon. There is certainly his divine influence on Maghar.

There is certainly the effect of Kabir Saheb on Maghar because here peace, cooperation, unity and goodwill is still maintained. The people from all castes and religions live here together. They have a mutual relationship with one another. There is no discrimination that here they are the Hindus or they are the Muslims. Shall we go to the Muslims or not? There is no such thing. This is the blessing of Kabir. There is the *ruhani* (mystical/esoteric) influence of Kabir Saheb on Maghar... his blessing has been on the entire Maghar in an indirect way... his *ruhani* power is working; his spiritual power is working.

Controversy and Kabir in Maghar

A few controversies have certainly broken out in Maghar, but the sensible people of both the sides have intervened and averted these controversies with the belief that Kabir wanted them to live together and his land must not be blotted. Through Kabir, they nullified the effects of these controversies and strengthened their unity more.

There have taken place four major controversies in Maghar³³⁴. The first controversy was the result of a cow-slaughter near Kabir's Cave. Shivamangal and Mohammad Aftab Alam narrated that around fifty years ago, a cow was beheaded and thrown near the cave of Kabir. In the morning when the Hindus saw it, they became furious and suspected the Muslims of having committed it. The situation got worse and was about to turn into a riot, but Maghar had a narrow escape:

He (someone) threw it near the cave. The Hindus have faith in cow and they thought that some Muslims might have beheaded the cow. It brought a riot-like situation.... The sensible Hindus and Muslims of Maghar also gathered. Both contemplated if there was any conspiracy.... The police officer concluded that a Muslim had not committed it. The people (Hindus) who were present on the occasion became extremely angry asking how the Muslims might not have killed. Then, would a Hindu have killed? Cow is a holy mother (*Gaumata*) of Hindu³³⁵. How could he have beheaded? He admitted and explained that if a Muslim had killed it, he would have killed it from the lower part of the neck, but the weapon had been stricken on the upper part of the neck of the cow.... Someone had hatched a conspiracy in order to spread a riot or controversy between them. Thus, the truth was disclosed. It was resolved.... Both shook hands addressing each other as brothers. They came to realize that they had a narrow escape; it (Maghar) was protected today otherwise today there would have been a stigma on its image³³⁶.

³³⁴ However, both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar do not consider them to be serious controversies. For them, these controversies were meaningless. This common attitude has also helped them preserve the shared culture of Maghar. This attitude is reflected in the following views. Shedding light on their relationship, Vidyashankar Pandey notes: "Here there is a peaceful relationship between the Hindus and Muslims. Here, the people are good in every way. I have been here for 40 years, but there is no such thing." Ram Shankar Yadav, a retired teacher from Shri Sant Kabir Ram Vilas Inter College: "Here there is the environment of the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*. No controversy has ever taken place. Here people live with love and goodwill. There has never been any upheaval or conflict. There have not taken place such Hindu-Muslim riots. The people live with friendly emotion for each other."

³³⁵ That 'cow is the *Gaumata* of Hindus' was more consolidated in the hearts of the Hindus of North India with the Cow-Protection movement in 1880s. In *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Gyanendra Pandey notes:

Several motifs appear again and again in the broadest appeals of the late 1880s and early 1890s. One is that of the cow as "universal mother", based on the proposition that all human beings drink the cow's milk: in consequence of this, the killing of a cow is represented as matricide. Another is that of the cow as the dwelling-place of all the major Hindu gods and goddesses, as a result of which cow-slaughter became doubly heinous in Hindus eyes. A third, which gains prominence by the end of the 1880s, is the representation of the Muslims — and to a lesser extent the English-man, the Indian Christian and others — as the hater of cows and, hence, the enemy of Hinduism. (p. 180)

³³⁶ This image reflects that syncretic culture of Maghar developed through the influence of Kabir.

The second controversy was the burning of a *tazia*³³⁷ during the procession of Muharram somewhere between 2009-2014. On the occasion of the Muharram procession, a *tazia* was burnt down. However, some sensible Muslims managed the situation, they got a new *tazia* constructed, and any possibility of controversy was averted.

The third riot happened during the Lakshmi Puja in 2015. In Maghar, Hindus organize Lakshmi *Puja* on the occasion of Deepawali every year. Muslims also participate in it. During the immersion, both give farewell to goddess Lakshmi together and the women of both communities also enjoy its procession. In 2015, when the procession reached the *Shisha Vali Masjid* (mosque of the mirror) in Sherpur Mohalla, some mischievous Hindu boys started bursting crackers at the mosque³³⁸. As a result, the Muslims living in the mosque protested. The situation turned tense. However, the sensible elders from both the communities reached and controlled the situation.

The fourth controversy also took place on the occasion of the Lakshmi Puja in 2016. It was more dangerous and almost created a rift between both the communities for some time. During the procession of the immersion of the idol, someone threw a stone upon the idol. The Hindus suspected of it to be a Muslim treason and reacted to it aggressively³³⁹. They started throwing stones at the houses of the Muslims and broke their vehicles and other objects. As a result, a curfew-like situation spread. However, the elder and sensible people of both the communities came forward in order to pacify the tense situation. The Muslims who had suffered maximum loss in this conflict did not complain to the police when they came for enquiry.

³³⁷ Model of the tombs of Imam Hussain to be carried in procession on the occasion of Muharram.

³³⁸ I was also told that in one of the processions of the Lakshmi Puja during the tenure of Ashwini Kumar Gupta, the former chairperson of Maghar municipality, the young Hindu boys also displayed the performance of swords like Muslims display in the Muharram festival. The Muslims of Maghar protested it and argued that the display of swords is not there in Hindu tradition and they should not display swords. After the intervention of the sensible Hindus, they stopped and did not repeat it. However, it really reflects the intolerance of some Hindu youth towards the sword-display of the Muslims.

³³⁹ However, Muslims believe it to be a Hindu treachery.

These controversies suggest a pattern of causes of rifts between Hindus and Muslims. In fact, defiling the religious places with cow/pig-slaughter, cow-slaughter on the occasion of Bakrid, frenzied Muharram processions, coexistence of mosque and temple, co-occurrence of the Hindu and Muslim festivals, destruction of mosque/temple etc. have often been the causes of riots between Hindus and Muslims in India (see G. Pandey, 1992).

The above controversies of Maghar reflect that the Hindu youths were more responsible for agitating the environment of Maghar. However, the most of the Hindus and the Muslims blame modern day politics, outsiders, and mischievous youths of both the communities (who were easily instigated) for these controversies. Many Muslims also blame Ashwini Kumar Gupta, the then Chairman, for the second and third conflicts. According to them, he aggravated the matter and added fuel to fire. Jamaluddin (50 years old), a friend of Khadim Hussain Ansari, relates it to the influence of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)³⁴⁰ on Ashwini Kumar Gupta: “Oh, it happened at the time of Ashwini Kumar Gupta. There was the BJP influence behind that.”

While shedding light on the above controversies, Hindus and the Muslims emphasize on their unity and credit Kabir for the resolution of the issues. Shaida Hussain Ansari points out that it was the benediction of Kabir that protected Maghar from being stigmatized though the attempts were made to destroy the composure of Maghar:

The attempts were certainly made, but here there has been the benediction of Kabir Saheb, which did not let them be successful.... it is the contribution of Kabir Saheb. Nothing happened. That (throwing stones by the Hindus) was a treason to create a riot. It was the blessing of Kabir Saheb that it did not increase. It remained limited or ineffective. Later on, this controversy was ended by forming a Peace Committee with the mutual brotherhood. In Maghar, even at that time in 1992, when the whole country was burning, no

³⁴⁰ I was told that the activists of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and orthodox Hindu organizations such as RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) were active in the tenure (2014-2018) of Ashwini Kumar Gupta. However, due to the strong influence of Kabir on the entire Maghar, they failed.

riot spread. Even that time, it showed an example of unity and brotherhood. However, a few people had tried to stigmatize it in 2015.

Haji Mohammad Rafiq from Kajipur Mohalla made a significant observation about Kabir's role in pacifying the tense situation between the Hindus and Muslims:

There has been no such controversy here. However, if any such controversy arises, it immediately subsides on account of the blessing of Kabir. It does not spread. The fact of the matter is that no such controversy is actually materialized. The second thing is that if any controversy breaks out, the people of both sides interfere and say that it is you and we; we are companions. We should not do so. All problems are resolved.

Such controversies certainly created a temporary rift in their mutual relationship, but under Kabir's impact, now it has recovered³⁴¹. Both the Hindus and Muslims have now continued their syncretic relationship and they demonstrated it in 2017 when coincidentally, both Deepawali and Muharram fell on 19th October 2017. Both the communities co-operated with each other and celebrated both the festivals together.

In resolving all these controversies, the role of the sensible people of both the communities has been very significant. In reality, these people have continuously made significant attempts to preserve the syncretic relationship and protect Maghar from the fire of communal violence. They have formed a few committees (Aman Committee, Peace Committee etc.) consisting of the members of both the communities in order to deal with such issues. The Aman Committee was formed in 1885 and remained in existence for about 20-25 years. The Peace Committee is still active. It reflects how both are committed to continuing their '*Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*' tradition.

³⁴¹ The following view of Said Ahmad reflects how both the Hindus and Maghar of Maghar recover their oneness and unity after any controversy: "This is a symbol of unity. This is a characteristic of Maghar. It is the real characteristic. You should understand that it is a natural gift. We are one. Sometimes they become tense. Later on, we keep on sharing *salaam, dua, namskar* (greetings). The environment gets normal."

Moreover, these sensible elder persons of both the communities are followed and respected by other people of Maghar as if they were assigned to preserving peace and brotherhood in Maghar. Misbahul Jamal (45 years old) notes:

Here, there has been no conflict up to now. However, if there takes place any conflict, sensible people sit and resolve it together ... all follow the words of these sensible people. These people are followed. Brother, if we do not follow, we will be out of control, who will help us? Therefore, the people follow the words of the sensible men and respect them. All such things are here. Kabir is the resolution of all.

The view of Misbahul Jamal clearly suggests that a sound mutual relationship has been the need of both the Hindus and Muslims. It is not only Misbahul Jamal who says that the people follow the words of sensible people, many other Hindus and Muslims also claim that in Maghar the elders are much respected and obeyed by their younger people. The Muslims committing something wrong can be scolded by the elder Hindus and vice-versa. It really makes the ambience of Maghar sound.

No difference between the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar

During my interviews with both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar, I have often heard them claiming that they are one and there is no difference/discrimination between them³⁴². Though they have different religious identities as the Hindus and Muslims, they dilute their religious identities claiming that they are one. Another common statement made by both is that no one can identify who the Hindus are and who the Muslims are. They appear determined to maintain the same kind of relationship in Maghar. I find them completely appropriating Kabir's message:

³⁴² I came across many such Muslims of Maghar, who do not wear the modern Muslim dress showing a Muslim identity. At the first impression, I could not distinguish them from the Hindus, but broadly speaking, differences between the two regarding their dress, appearance, manners of worship etc. certainly exist. However, they claim no difference between each other in the sense that they have a feeling of respect to each other and their traditions and therefore, they have a feeling of oneness.

Hindu main hoon nahin musalman bhi nahin
Panchtatva ko pootala, gaibi khele mahin
(I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim;
An effigy of five elements, in which I play.)

The claims of the Hindus and Muslims that we are one and no outsider can identify who the Hindus are and who the Muslims are also the result of their intertwined life. Misbahul Jamal highlights the fact that the routines of the Hindus and Muslims are so intermeshed that they cannot be differentiated: “It is not known who the Muslims are here and who the Hindus are here. Here, all are seen together. They talk, eat and drink together. They sit together at the same tea stalls. No one finds differences. Such mingling is very common. It is famous by the name of *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb*.”

However, Gulam Kibriya Ansari brings out another significant aspect about the relationship of the Hindus and Muslims, especially in the context of oneness of the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar. According to him, the absence of the dominance of the upper castes is the main reason of the sound relationship between them³⁴³: “Here there is harmony. It is parallel. Here both the Hindus and Muslims are equal. And the castes which cause fractions are not present here ... the fact of the matter is that there have not been many Brahmins and Thakurs. There are a few, but they are outsiders. They are suppressed. Here there is a very peaceful atmosphere.” Since in Indian society, Brahmins and other upper castes always try to establish their hegemony over the people of lower castes by exploiting, discriminating and dividing them, Gulam Kibriya Ansari is marked by this experience, but it cannot be forgotten

³⁴³ In Maghar, there are 7-10 houses of Brahmins; one belongs to the Singh and 10-12 belong to the Srivastava caste. However, Brahmins, Thakurs and Srivastava are not the original citizens of Maghar. They are outsiders. In terms of their approach to Kabir, I have observed that they also express a strong devotion to Kabir and contribute to many activities associated with Maghar Kabir Math. I found Jagdish Tiwari (his family came from Banaras and settled here) to be a great follower of Kabir. According to Jagdish Tiwari, the Brahmins and other upper castes are also devoted to Kabir. As per my observation, Kabir’s pervasive influence on Maghar also drives them to harmonizing its rapport with other castes. In fact, Kabir’s strong influence does not let the Brahmanical dominance flourish in Maghar.

that Mullahs are also found agitating common Muslims on many issues. However, the best thing in Maghar is that Kabir controls over both Brahmins and Mullahs.

Participation in the Other

As we have already discussed that living together, the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar have shared each other's traditions and cultures. They have become the part and parcel of each other's life. In Maghar, there is a huge participation in festivals and other happy and sad occasions of each other. This tradition may certainly be prevalent in other parts of the country as well, but it is more common at Maghar. Kalamuddin Manshoori rightly observes that the communal mishaps in many parts of the country have destroyed the shared culture between the Hindus and Muslims, but in Maghar, this culture is still preserved and nurtured:

You will not get such an atmosphere anywhere else. In the present time, there are many issues in India, but there are not such things in our Maghar. Whether it is Dussehra or Deepawali, the people celebrate all the festivals together. They are also present in the procession of Eid, Muharram, *Tazia* etc. On the occasion of Eid, we go to offer *namaz*; they remain standing outside. When we come outside after reciting the *namaz*, they shower affection on us. We invite them as well. After departing from here, they come to our houses. We have breakfast together. They come to us.

Talking about the mutual celebrations of each other's festivals, Mohammad Salim (37 years old) who runs a cloth shop with the name '*Kabir Vashtralaya*' makes a significant comment on the development and need of this shared culture: "Both the communities celebrate them together. There is no such thing. Both the communities are good. If we do not celebrate (together), how the things will go on? Brother, no work is accomplished by just one community. To live together is the duty of both. Only then, the work is accomplished." The view of Mohammad Salim clearly highlights that both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar are each other's need. They are dependent on each other³⁴⁴.

³⁴⁴ This interdependence is also reflected in terms of profession. Mohammad Rayis suggests that they want this unity to be maintained also for the purpose of profession:

Interaction through Kabir Colleges and Schools Run by Maghar Kabir Math

There are three important institutes directly associated with the Maghar Kabir *Math* at Maghar: Sant Kabir Acharya Ram Vilas Inter College, Amrit Vichar Academy, and Sant Kabir Acharya Amrit Das Mahavidyalaya³⁴⁵. Sant Kabir Acharya Ram Vilas Inter College Maghar is a government-aided college and is the main educational institution of Maghar. The manager of this college is the present *Mahant* 'Vichar Das'. Kabirpanthi students from the Kabir *Math* also study in the school.

The Hindus and Muslims of Maghar are committed to maintaining their brotherhood and unity. This should be maintained because many Hindus and Muslims are associated with each other through the profession of sewing and preparing clothes. Any disturbance in their unity will affect their profession. Since the work of readymade clothes is done in Maghar. We do the work of cutting clothes. The Hindus also sew clothes. They sew our clothes and we sew their clothes. Therefore, if the relationship of Maghar is preserved, it will be good.

In fact, at the level of profession or the economic level, the Hindus and Muslims were associated with each other in the past as well. After the freedom of the country, a Gandhi Ashram was established in which both worked there. A Cloth Mill was also founded at Maghar in 1978. Unfortunately, both are now closed. Since the Hindus and Muslims worked together at the Mill, their mutual economic relationship also strengthened their unity.

³⁴⁵ Sant Harisharan Das Shastri (an influential saint from the Maghar Kabir *Math*) is the principal of Sant Kabir Acharya Amrit Das Mahavidyalaya Maghar.



Figure 49: Schools and colleges run by Maghar Kabir *Math*

It is to be noted that these institutes have more than 60% Muslim students. What is more important to note is that these students are often involved in cultural programmes organized by the Kabir *Math* and these students also participate in the Maghar Mahotsava. Along with their academic education, these students naturally get lessons on Kabir from Kabir *Math* and other activities associated with Kabir, which take place on Kabir *Nirvana Sthali*. I myself have recorded the participation of the students in the programmes associated Kabir and Maghar Mahotsava.



Figure 50: Students participating in the inauguration of *Khichadi Mela* organized by *Kabir Math*

The morning assembly of the schools ends with the collective proclamation “Victory to Sant Kabir.” During the assembly, a couple of verses of Kabir are also recited in order to enlighten the students with Kabir’s teachings and messages. On the occasion of Independence Day, Republic Day etc., *Mahant Vichar Das* is invited as the chief guest. During his address to the students, he enlightens them with some messages and teachings of Kabir as well.

Since these institutes are directly associated with the *Kabir Math*, the students are often exposed to the teachings of Kabir. As a result, Kabir culture is transmitted among them since their school life. The Kabir culture can be seen among the students of these institutes. Hindu and Muslim students interact with each other and grow up with the culture of Kabir, which cultivates a syncretic mindset among them.

Interaction through Maghar Mahotsava (*Khichadi Mela*)

Maghar Mahotsava is a very special and significant occasion for the entire Maghar. This Mahotsava is formally organized between 12th and 18th January every year³⁴⁶. Tracing its history, I discovered it as an extended version of the traditional (old) *Khichadi Mela*³⁴⁷ dedicated to Kabir, which was held on the occasion of Hindu festival Khichadi (Makar Sankranti³⁴⁸) for one day. On the occasion of Makar Sankranti, there has been a tradition of offering *khichadi*³⁴⁹ at both the shrines of Kabir and at the Kabir Cave by Kabirpanthi and non-Kabirpanthi Hindus of Maghar and other places. On the other hand, a large number of Muslims from Maghar and other places continue to visit Kabir's shrines, especially Kabir *Mazar* and many of them continue to offer *dua* or *fatiha* (prayer) at Kabir *Mazar*³⁵⁰. The local people claim that these traditions have been continuing since Kabir's time.

³⁴⁶ From the point of view of the Kabirpanthis, three days (from 13th to 15th January) are important. During these days, Kabirpanthis from different parts of the country gather at Kabir *Math* to show their reverence to Kabir. Many of them sing *bhajans* in groups wherever they stay at the accommodations of the *Math*. On behalf of the *Math*, the *satsangs and pravchans* are also organized on 14th and 15th January. A huge *bhandara* is also given at Kabir *Math* and Kabir's cave on both days. A large number of people, especially Kabirpanthis, participate in this *bhandara* as they believe it to be the holy *Prasad* of Kabir.

³⁴⁷ In *Kabir and His Followers*, Key mentions a fair which lasts over a month. However, it is not clear whether this fair was held on occasion of Khichadi. The first reference to the *Khichadi Mela* is found in *Kabir and Kabirpanth* (1965) by K. Dwivedi. Dwivedi writes: "R. C. A. S. Hovert, the then commissioner of Gorakhpur, along with the local people organized a fair twice a year in 1933 near the *Math*, but three years later, he was transferred and the process of the fair ended. However, recently due to the attempt of the Kabirpanthis, the fair has been organized for 3-4 years, but now the significance of this fair is not more than that of a small market" (p. 165). According to a local newspaper 'Hindustan' published on 12 January 2020, this fair was inaugurated in 1933 on the occasion of Makar Sankranti in the memory of Kabir by the English commissioner R. C. Hovert. Hovert organized a fair of one day with the help of rich and honorary magistrate late Rampriya Saran Singh (Jhinakoo Baboo). However, the people of Maghar claim that the *Khichadi Mela* is ancient and has been held for centuries.

³⁴⁸ This festival is dedicated to Lord Sun. From the day of Makar Sankranti, the sun begins its northward (*Uttarayan*) journey. It enters the zodiac sign of Capricorn (Makar) which marks the end of winter months and the beginning of longer days. It is also the festival of donation and taking a holy bath. On this day, pulse, rice and puffed rice etc. are offered to deities.

³⁴⁹ Rice, puffed rice, pulse, etc. are offered in the form of *Khichadi* at Kabir's shrines and other places associated with Kabir at Maghar.

³⁵⁰ Kabir becomes a Hindu god on Makar Sankranti (Khichadi). At the same time, for the Kabirpanthis, he is their God or *Sadguru*, and for the Muslims he is their *Pir* or *Wali*. In fact, on this occasion, three traditions interact with each other through Kabir.



Figure 51: Hindus and Muslims worshipping Kabir on the occasion of *Khichadi Mela* (Maghar Mahotsava)



Figure 52: Maghar *Khichadi Mela* (Maghar Mahotsava)

This *Khichadi Mela* took the form of Maghar Mahotsava in 1987. Pankaj Agrawal, the then Collector of Basti district, had a strong attachment to Kabir. It was he who inspired the local people to celebrate it as Maghar Mahotsava. This fair was organized for three days through the donation of the local Hindus and Muslims. The fortune of Mahotsava changed in 2004. The then Chief Minister of the state, Mulayam Singh Yadav had come to inaugurate the Mahotsava. On this occasion, he declared it as a government fair and announced to give 25 lakh rupees per year for the organization of the fair. In 2004, the fair was also extended from three days to eight days. Since then, it has regularly been held for eight days. The fair has now been named ‘Sant Kabir Sampradayik Soharg Mela’ in order to strengthen the bond of the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar and other places.

To organize this fair, a committee has been formed. Both the Hindus and Muslims from Maghar are its members. The patron of this committee is *Mahant Vichar Saheb*³⁵¹; the chairperson is the local District Magistrate and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) is the sub-chairman. There are other eleven founder members (from Maghar) in it.

The purpose of the fair is to spread Kabir’s teachings and messages among people. Awadesh Kumar Singh, a member of the committee, says that this fair is organized during the Makar Sankranti because it gives a grand opportunity to transmit the messages and teachings of Kabir among people:

We popularize Kabir Saheb. Many Kabir *Ghostis* (seminars and conferences) are organized to transmit his messages and teachings among common people. Many programmes are organized. Kabir also wanted the same — to connect the people with his teachings and messages. The day after tomorrow on 14 January, around fifty-thousand people will offer *Khichadi* to Kabir here. You will see on 14 January. Fifty thousands of people offer *Khichadi* ... the Maghar Mahotsava is scheduled during the same time so that all people can interact with one another and Kabir’s words can be spread.

³⁵¹ However, the *Mutvalli* of the *Mazar* has not been included in it.



Figure 53: Maghar Mahotsava 2020

On the occasion of Maghar Mahotsava from 12th to 18th January, different cultural and religious programmes are organized. Not all the programmes are directly associated with Kabir although this Mahotsava is organized in the name of Kabir. The programmes are selected keeping the interests of Hindus, Muslims and Kabirpanthis into focus. Thus, three traditions meet one another through this Mahotsava. I would like to highlight some of the main programmes held during the 2020 Mahotsava. They themselves show the interaction of the three cultures (Hindu, Muslim and Kabirpanthi): 12/01/2020 [Kavi Sammelan and *Mushaira*, Cultural Programmes/Folk Songs], 13/01/2020 [Kabir *Darbar* (Kabir *Satsangs* and *Pravachans*), Sufi Singing and *Bhajan Sandhya*, *Javabi Qawwali* (Counter *Qawwali*)], 14/01/2020 [*Sarvadharm Sadbhav Sammelan* (All Religions Harmony Conference), Traditional Folk Singing, Counter *Biraha*], 15/01/2020 [Alha Singing, Sufi *Bhajans* and Programmes based on Kabir, Traditional Folk Singing, *Braj ki Holi*, Bhojpuri Folk Singing], 16/01/2020 [Traditional Folk Singing, *Aman Sangeet Sanskritic Manch*, *Bhajan Sandhya*, Bhojpuri Folk Singing, Singing of Traditional Songs], 17/01/2020 [*Antyakshari* based on the Verses of Kabir, and Speech Competition, Folk Singing and Other Music Programmes, Folk Drama Programmes, Songs and *Bhajans*, Geet Music, Theatre], and 18/01/2020 [*Bhajan*

Nirguna Gayan, Cultural Programmes by the Students, Avadhi Folk Singing, *Sangeet Sandhya*].

However, Kabir is common in all the three traditions in the sense that the performers and artists start their programmes with paying tributes to Kabir. It is to be noted that most of the programmes are based on music. Besides regular Kabir singers, other folk singers also start their programmes with a tribute to Kabir by singing a couple of Kabir's verses or *padas*.

The most important aspect of this eight-day Maghar Mahotsava is audiences. The Hindus and Muslims in large numbers participate in these programmes as audiences. Sometimes, the number of the Muslim audiences is greater than the Hindu audiences. The women of both the communities also participate and take a great interest in all the performances as audiences. However, the number of Muslim women is often greater than that of Hindu women.



Figure 54: Hindus and Muslims of Maghar watching Maghar Mahotsava together at night

Significance of the Maghar Mahotsava

Since Maghar Mahotsava is organized in the name of Kabir and it brings both the Hindus and Muslims close to Kabir's verses, messages and teachings. Singers and performers always initiate with some words of Kabir and verses which are also received by the Muslims present on the occasion. Kalamuddin Manshoori unveils how Maghar Mahotsava transmits Kabir's messages and teachings among them:

Programmes start with his couplets and *bhajans*... when the Maghar Mahotsava starts, in the beginning anyone can come. Whether they are the singers of Bollywood songs or any singers, all start with invocatory verses attributed to Kabir. Since it is the land of Kabir, the programmes are initiated with Kabir's couplets and words here. I enjoy them sitting together with other Hindus and Muslims. We try to construe the meanings of the couplets and verses of Kabir.

Maghar Mahotsava is a shared tradition of the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar. It equally belongs to both. In the beginning of the Maghar Mahotsava 2020, I tried to record and identify the Hindu and Muslim audiences separately, but soon, I stopped because I discovered that it is a mixed culture of Maghar. Here, nothing is possible without the mix of both. I would say that this Mahotsava celebrates the Hindu-Muslim integration where Kabir is placed at the centre. The people of both the communities are equally inclined towards the Mahotsava. I found that the whole fair is of both the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar. Misbahul Jamal admits how the *Khichadi Mela* of the Hindus becomes the fair of the Muslims and a source of interaction between the Hindus and Muslims:

Both the communities assemble. Whenever there is a function, the people of both the communities assemble. Right now, this is the fair of *Khichadi*. It starts from 12th January. The people of both the communities are present there. Their unity has been maintained. Both the communities assemble here. All the rules are formed. The Hindus and Muslims assemble to celebrate this festival. There is no feeling of difference that it is of the Hindus. While the fair of *Khichadi* is personally of the Hindus, in it, no one can distinguish who the Hindus are and who the Muslims are.

Maghar Mahotsava dedicated to Kabir plays a significant role not only in wielding the unity of the Hindus and Muslims but also in creating a syncretic culture between the Hindus and Muslims. Its present name 'Sant Kabir Sohaard evam Sanskritik Mela' itself suggests its purpose, role and significance. During the different programmes between 12th and 18th January, the themes which are most highlighted are: the spirit and significance of Kabir for the people of Maghar, unity of Hindus and Muslims and shared Hindu and Muslim spirituality. In the poetry recitation and *mushaira* programmes, the poets of both the religions are invited and they lay a great emphasis on Kabir and communal harmony. There are also many such programmes which are based on Hindu gods and goddesses, and religious tradition as well as culture. These programmes are also enjoyed by the Muslims of Maghar, who appear to have admiration for songs and dramatic performances based on Ram, Krishna, Radha, Durga, Kali etc. On the other hand, the Hindus also share songs and poems on Muslim devotional themes. The names or terms such as *Allah*, *Paigambar* (prophet), *Maula*, *Ali* are commonly spoken by Muslim singers and poets. Thus, through the Maghar Mahotsava, both share Hindu-Muslim devotional, cultural and musical traditions which are a strong source of interaction between the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar.

Most importantly, the people of both the communities preserve the ambience of peace and unity during huge gatherings on the occasion of Maghar Mahotsava. Though the Maghar Mahotsava continued for eight days, the fair runs around a month in which one can see the whole Maghar overwhelmed with Kabir's spirit. The Hindus and Muslims share this fair and Kabir *Nirvana Sthali* every day without any upheaval. During the whole month, besides enjoying the fair, many of them also visit Kabir and pay their reverence to him. Thus, this fair along with Kabir becomes a common ground for the interaction between the Hindus and Muslims.

Significance of 1987 for Maghar

It is to be noted that the year 1987 has been very significant for Maghar. By 1987, the shared culture nurtured by Ami river, Gandhi Ashram and Cloth Mill needed a fillip as Gandhi Ashram and Cloth Mill were closed and the river suffered from the polluted water. This shared culture found this fillip from the Maghar Mahotsava in 1987. This new shared culture consisting of Kabir culture, Islamic and Hindu traditions of music, Islamic and Hindu spiritual traditions again flourished.

Since 1987, the importance of Kabir has grown more. Most importantly, the entire Maghar is not only associated with Maghar Mahotsava but also with Kabir and his traditions. During these years, Maghar Kabir *Math* also developed and the visit of the Kabirpanthis from all over India became more frequent. I have observed that both the Hindus and Muslims respect the Kabirpanthis and treat them as their guests. This is also one of the factors which play a significant role in maintaining the syncretic relationship of both. Both want that they should not do anything which may mitigate Maghar's reputation. Thus, Kabir affects the religious, social, political and cultural life of Maghar.

Conclusion

Kabir is an integral part of Hindu-Muslim life of Maghar. The common belief that 'Kabir wanted both the Hindus and Muslims to live together' developed not only a relationship of unity but also a shared culture between them. Kabir culture consisting of Kabir's shrines and other relics is intertwined with the social, cultural and religious milieu of Maghar. The co-existence of the shrines has become a defining indicator of their relationship. Their unity and shared culture have been strengthened and nurtured by their geographical location and *Khichadi Mela* or Maghar Mahotsava. However, the political interferences can be seen as a great danger to this unity, but the Hindus and Muslims of Maghar have

successfully averted them and preserved the unbroken tradition of their syncretic relation through the inspiration of Kabir.

Undoubtedly, Maghar presents a great model of Hindu-Muslim relationship and co-existence of both. This model of *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* of Maghar can be a guide for the Hindu-Muslim relationship in all other parts of the country, especially those where communal violence is soaring high.