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INDIAN DESIGN MAGAZINE



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Ahmedabad-based artist Bharti Prajapati's Kabir paintings



MS. BHARTI PRAJAPATI

Award-winning artist Bharti Prajapati was born in 1962, in Vadodara, Gujarat. Having studied textile design at Sophia Polytechnic, Mumbai and the National Institute of Design (NID) Ahmedabad, she worked as a textile designer for 10 years. Later returning to explore her long-time passion – painting – Prajapati's work has strong philosophical overtones.

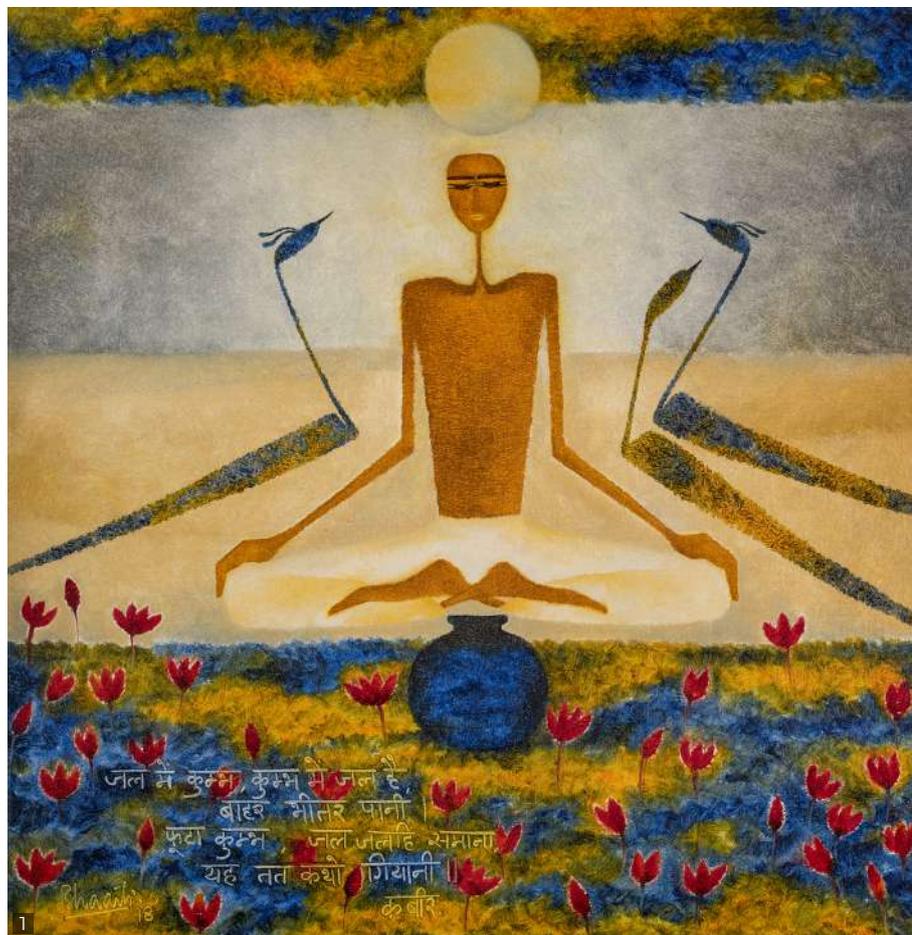
In this feature, we focus on the artist's Kabir Collection. With over 25 paintings in the collection that she has painted as a tribute to the great saint and philosopher, Prajapati is seen exploring the couplets (dohe) by Sant Kabir.

Text: Ar. Roopa Sabnis Pinge

Photographs: Courtesy the artist

Bharti Prajapati's art has unique stylistic language. She chooses her subjects well; taking up issues that interest her, and intrigue her. The influence of Indian narratives in various forms – arts, crafts, literature, culture and traditions – is evident in her paintings.

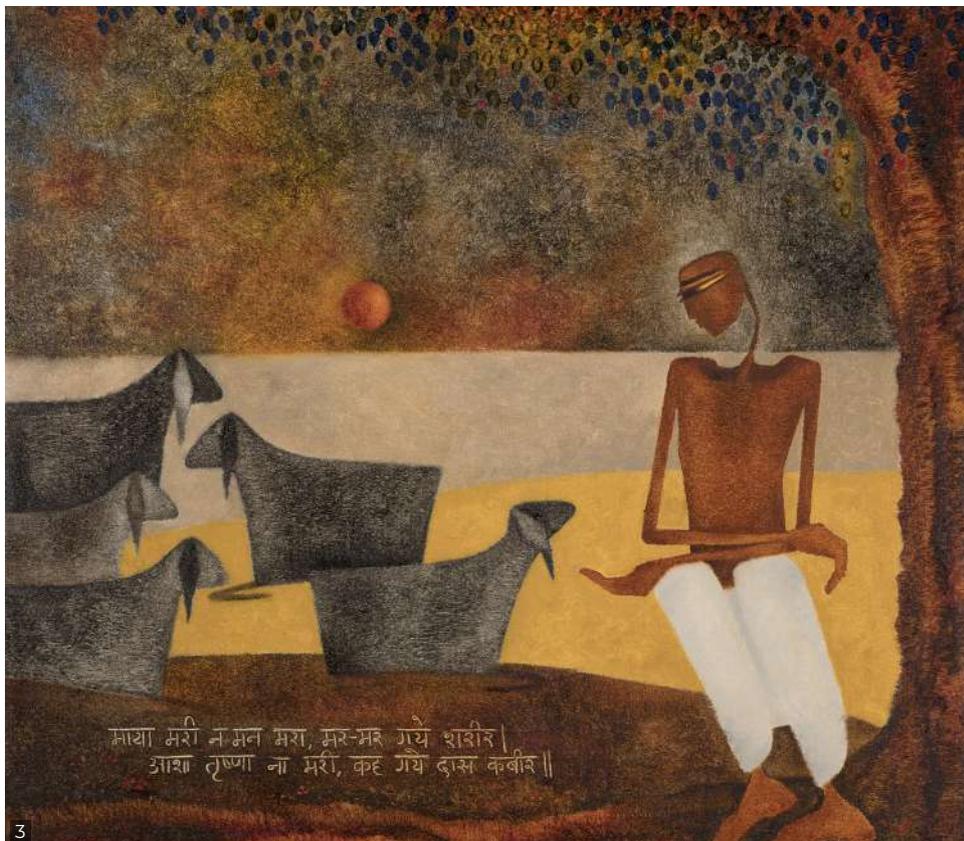
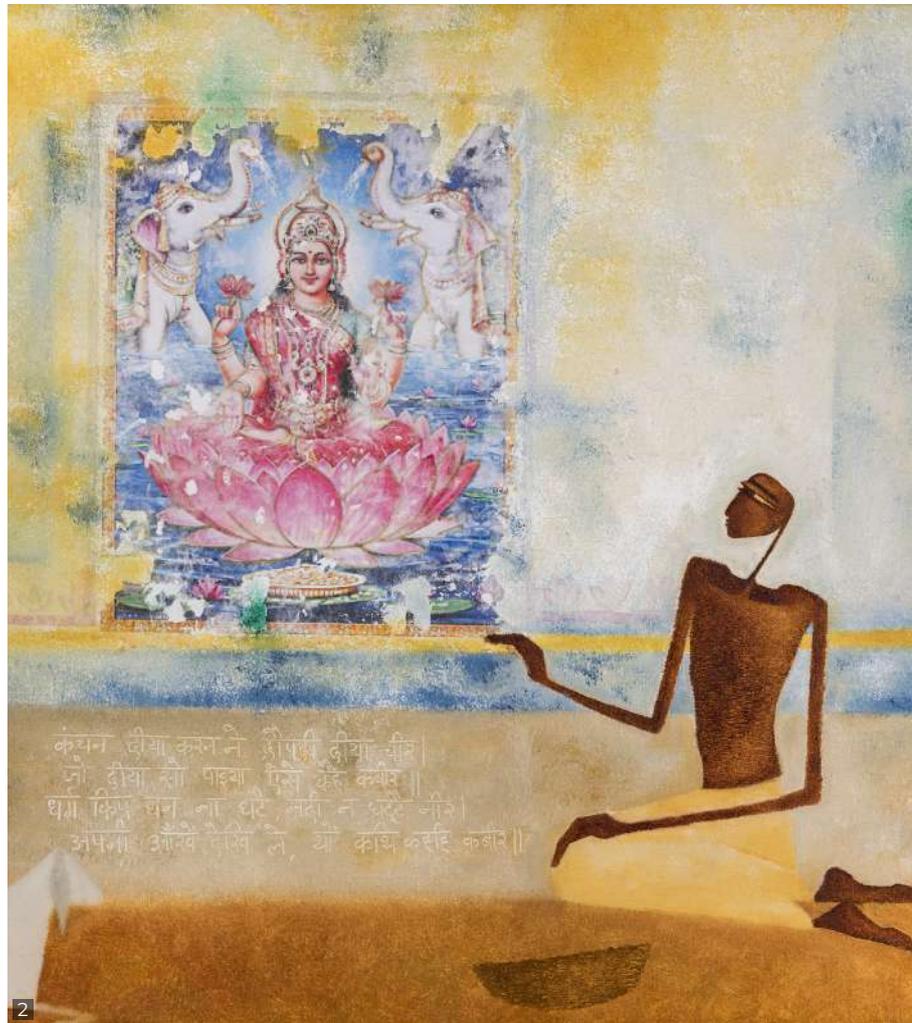
Born in 1938, in a village on the banks of the Ganga, Kabir – the great Indian saint, mystic, philosopher and poet – is best known for his brilliant and insightful words shared in the form of poetry. Despite the lack of formal education, Kabir's exceptional talent found a way to reach out to people through the medium of poetry. The couplets, known as 'dohe' are in rustic dialects from central and northern India; indicating that Kabir travelled extensively and met many people from different classes and religions. All his poetry comes from the knowledge and wisdom he gained from those travels and experiences. Kabir's satirical, thought-provoking verses are seen to rebel against many social and religious evils prevalent in the society of the times he lived in; and many of them are significant even today.



Since 2004, Prajapati has been working on paintings inspired by *Kabir's dohe*; intending always to make it a large and meaningful collection. "Ever since I began reading the couplets and verses, I realised how wise, timeless and simple they are..." muses Prajapati. "No other saint has put across philosophy in a manner which reaches straight to the heart; urging us to rise above the mundane and achieve a life of inner peace."

"Kabir's poems have the ability to create a panorama of visuals - which to me as an artist is extremely exciting and enriching for ideation of forms and contexts." Many of the paintings have Kabir's enlightening and inspirational dohe inscribed on them. "The thought of inscribing doha onto the paintings was ideally to urge the viewer to read and absorb the precious treasure that Kabir brings, through his words," says the artist.

Bharti's artistic sensibility is heightened by her understanding of Kabir's insightful verses. And she has been able to transfer it all beautifully on to her paintings. Maintaining her original style of painting and her markedly



1. Paintings inspired by Kabir's dohe—growing into a large, meaningful collection

2. Bharti's art beautifully captures the depth of Kabir's verses

3. Kabir's call: Look beyond rituals, seek true wisdom

different representations of the human form, she paints Kabir, with his dohas lending more credence to the visual impressions.

The famous phrase "Dekh Kabira Roya" (देख कबीरा रोया) from one of the poems of Saint Kabir, has a deeply philosophical meaning. It is an expression of Kabir's anguish over the plight of humankind. The simple yet profound thought is regarded as Kabir's call for self-reflection, and urging people of all religions to look beyond mindless rituals, material life and seek true knowledge, freedom, and spiritual fulfilment.

"Wisdom has its own path to reach the seeker. In this fast and competitive age we live in, the wise words of Sant Kabir are all the more important. This is my attempt to reach out and share Kabir's thoughts. Through this series of paintings, I pay tribute to the great saint," smiles Prajapati.

Bharti Prajapati's work has been honoured with various awards like the Critics' choice Award World University of Design, Bharat Kala Ratna Award, Gujarat Kala Pratisthan, Lalit Kala Gaurav Puraskar, Gujarat State Lalit Kala Academy and FICCI, Women Achiever Award. ■

4. In a fast world, Kabir's wisdom lights the path through her paintings

