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## How Kabir Das expounds evil! A study in light of Kabir's mystical poetry

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### Abstract

The most briskly discussed, however, without clear and satisfactory philosophical and religious justification is the concept of evil. In binary oppositional sense it has been associated with human life since the day of creation which in more pristine sense is the product of first sin of Adam and Eve, as is believed in some theological traditions. High wits broach over it as having circumference in all dimensions of human life and that it is the opposite of what is thought as virtue and ethics also. It, since thought and explored variedly, gives birth to a good number of complex and for the intellectual coterie, even baffling questions on its nature, origin, its essence, etc. Undoubtedly, many answers to the questions like how evil entered the universe, why God created it or let it exist, if evil had been there prior to the world, would it not then be a problem in the notion of God's ontological goodness, if God did create it, does it not simply mean that God is malicious, if not God but Devil bred it, is it not then a negative mark on God's Almightyness and Omnipotence, if God created it and let it be in the world, is it not metaphysical foolishness to acknowledge God ordaining to aloof from it.

This paper shall be framed on the concept of evil from moral aspect according to Kabir Das in light of The Bijak of Kabir by Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh, The Songs of Kabir by Rabindranath Tagore, The Songs of Kabir by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and prefaced by Windy Doniger. The effort shall be made to come up with the thought that how evil is the outcome of Maya or delusion or sheer ignorance and how it bears no proportion in Divine transcendence in the mystical theodicy of Kabir Das. For that endeavour other relevant and suggestive along with secondary sources shall be consulted with to substantiate the theme with judicious corroboration. The sources for the elaboration shall be philosophical, religious and ethical. Moreover, some references shall be, if necessary, taken from texts from cultural studies since the theme culturally and anthropologically has an indomitable significance.

**Keywords:** Nirguna, saguna, salvation, maya, manifestation, asceticism

### Introduction

Kabir Dass, as one of the ever reputed and celebrated mystical and philosophical saints of India from 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Kashi Banaras, is an emblem of Indian mysticism and, at the same time, the hallmark of Bakhti movement with a mission to rebel against all that derails from the pedestal of humanity or that which lets the pedestal derailed; In the process, with unflinching alacrity and valor, he tries to unite the divided, gather the scattered, unify the varied at the cost of repelling the pseudo religiosity, spurning the ideals followed then to create crevice and fissure in the social fibre, with all antipathy and antagonistic approach against all that which divides people on the line of true humanity. As a mystic and outspoken philosopher, though he never had schooling or scholastic gumption from anybody anywhere, his philosophy and esoteric thoughts find foundations in the quest of devotional excellence and exuberance up to such a zenith where, "He says that if one likes to see his face, he should keep the mirror clean". (Prasoon 78).

In the poetry of Kabir Dass, the true and sanguine readership unearths, in sheen didactic style, however, in absence of all highly demagogic rhetoric, the lessons of purity in all good deeds in order that purity exists, that in all the way is safeguarded from insincere equanimity which always is there as a result of wrong judgment because of ignorance ever brought forth with the evil of Maya which idiosyncratically of Kabir is the root of all other evils, and from here the salvation lies not in the ceremonial customs and the futile exercises out of senseless religious following. For that reason Kabir is phlegmatic or aptly to say, a furious rebel when in harsh tune says,

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Listen carefully,  
 Neither the Vedas,  
 Nor the Qur'an  
 Will teach you this:  
 Put the bit in its mouth,  
 The saddle on its back,  
 Your foot in the stirrup,  
 And ride your wild runaway mind  
 All the way to heaven. (Trans. By Mehrotra 15)

Since all religions, as held, that too even cosmically, lead to the ultimate truth, fall as null and void when Kabir in them finds breaches in real life situations as evident in religious sectarianism, sanctimonious asceticism, other travesties and ambivalence in human acts as far as it is, to Kabir, all religions are thus nothing more than that of other shades of evil which wins unbound vicissitudes from him while disseminating in full unfurling theory of evil and offering a bridge to cross and aloof from it. Evil in Kabir's mystical concept is all that breads ignorance against the reality: it is another name of duality in the minds of a man against the experience of universal oneness of beings. This discretion of him shares a similar proportion of Bhagwat Gita on the subject with the acknowledgement that there with actual being there is no inclusion of otherness or duality as Chandradhar Sharma writes, "The soul is indestructible (avinashi), eternal (nitya), unborn (aja), undiminishing (avyaya), all-pervasive (sarva-gata), immovable (achala), ancient (sanatana), unmanifest (avyakta), unthinkable (achintya) and immutable (avikarya)" (33). To experience all this mystically Kabir holds that it goes in the strict adherence to threefold method comprising of action, devotion and knowledge which alone help one to exonerate from the impact of negativity and get salvation thereupon.

Kabir Das as a pure mystic believes that human existence originally edifices itself on the archetype of true essence of things which makes its evident presence in being close, to be more clear, one with the Ultimate and Uncaused all Supreme from whom things emanate and at the end annihilate in whom he calls Brahma which in Upanishads from subjective standpoint is Atman which according to Kabir encompasses everything and goes equivalent on the point where Sri Sankara believes, "The entity of Atman. All-pervading, devoid of any attributes of samsara, and in its unconditioned state subjected to no modification" (Sastri 10). 'Heaven' as an image in Kabir's poetry symbolically is a stage of self-annihilation whereupon the seeker is nothing but an epitome of Divine grace; there what is experienced is all truth and goodness, accentually the highest excellence of virtuosity for there no earthly beguile affects the experience of the sum caught in the vision. For Kabir it is the mystical camaraderie unlocking the knots of existential candor. Thus, since according to Dr. R.N. Sharma:

Evil is not transcendental since that would lead us to a fatalistic philosophy in which evil always exists and can never be annihilated. Actually, it would be practical to accept that evil exists at the material, biological and intellectual level. On these levels evil is present as negation of good. (85)

Kabir's conscience accepts no cleave with it on the nature of evil his agreement is on the idea of evil being not an eternal and in no way the attribute of Brahma, therefore created not by God or even by man but flows itself in the situation of

being caught in the phenomenal grace that defiles the mind with sense and sensation of multiplicity in it. He says:

The river and its waves are one  
 surf: where is the difference  
 between the river and its waves?  
 When the wave rises, it is the water;  
 and when it falls, it is the same  
 water again. Tell me, Sir, where  
 is the distinction? (Trans. By Tagore 57)

In mysticism all ascending hierarchies end at the point where human being is experienced as the highest one in all respects: such is his excellence that he is the crown of the creation. Nevertheless, what element of him wins him such marginality is the excellence which proves propitious in fashioning the ethical essence. In Kabir's philosophy so is, in reality, moral degradation or moral fall of the human; it for him is the root of all evils on mystical levels in particular and at the level of society in common. Such a being to Kabir spreads evil in the society to put it to the utter chaos and confusion yet the moral retrogression again is the root cause of dissociation with the ultimate reality paving way to other aspects of ignorance which according to Kabir are from man's conscious and unconscious side that together breed in the world the social imbalance with cruelty, injustice, hate, murder, greed, etc. From historical background if these evils, out of moral paucity, be viewed through the spectacle of Marxist theory, nothing other than these are the foundations of social unrest which basically are there as the aftermaths of class divisions, class dominance, etc and that, "In fact what happens is that at every point in history, competent minds work assiduously to frame laws that would legitimize the misappropriation of socially generated resources by a few in society" (Chugh 206).

On social level, dearth of ethics brings forth all social evils in multifarious dimensions: in politics it has preponderance over the fate of socially downcast and riff-raff when there comes the time of equal proportions and privileges which was in vogue during Gupta reigns when Brahmanism held all political and religious favour in India, for after all it is power that changes and redrafts the semantics of social norms and foundations since, "cultural forms and practices are linked to material conditions of social relations, production and profits" (Nayar 203). Maya and evil as in Vedantic school of thought have been of immense significance, so equally in a refined, yet in bizarre manner in Kabir's wisdom when he holds, "The dust on the mirror is like the soul of such a man who has done unwholesome deeds, shown excessive indulgence into sensual pleasures and material gain" (Prasoon 79). The crux of Kabir's mystical epistemology of being and essence framed on the condition of a man of his emancipation from all that is illusionary or simply illusion which is, in an entangled scheme discussed in Advaita or non dualistic domain of Hindu philosophy where in extended form it is held as the strong force overlapping the goodness and its essence and as it is, is on work to create cosmic delusion in trail of presenting the infiniteness of Brahma on the parameters of finite fixities which, to Kabir, are not more than those of habitual, however foolish whims. He says:

Swan, you're strong  
 but your habits are weak.

You're streaked with dirty colors  
And screwing  
with various lovers. (Trans. By Hess and Singh 91)

Excellence in goodness is the soul agency of soaring up above the self hoodwinking. Here Kabirian concept of evil is synonym for being caught in consideration of multiplicity of beings and that the ajnana or ignorance is the only curtain in the Gnosticism of essence. This is not only the product of imaginative, empirical and rational faculties but the channel of fallacies. In philosophical dimension Descartes holds, "reason is the source of true knowledge. Knowledge is given by the clear vision of the intellect or reason alone" (Sinha 25). In close opposition to the empiricist, Hume in the effectuation or production, there is no power behind proved, therefore it is not there as it is not a matter of perception. So, "where there is no impression there is no idea, i.e., the idea is worthless as knowledge; or, where there is no impression the idea is meaningless, is non sense..." (Lavine 160). Despite these the idealistic wits of sheer sterility, when in depth analysis of Kabir's poetry is done one finds serious repudiation as null and naught. To him:

The three worlds are a cage,  
virtue and vice a net.  
Every creature is the prey,  
and one hunter:  
Death. (Trans. By Hess and Singh 91)

Kabir believes also of evil as attributing form to the formless as aforementioned: as a pure mystic, believer of ontological unification of beings he is ranked as one of, "those who subscribed to the view that God is formless, nirguna, always scoffed at the forms because they believed the forms led to confusion and conflict" (Bhasha 27). This conflict and confusion bears the sense of suffering out of committing sins that cogently breed the odious cycle of transmigration of souls in proportion to the nature of karma. Kabir nowhere in his poetry has concomitance with pessimistic view of life rather there is hope and inspiration letting for one in quest merge with clemency to pave way to the liberation which joins one to the reality ultimately. Despite all that liberation to Kabir has to be acquired through action, devotion and true knowledge. Delusive aspect is duly with the scheme of human life since Chandradhar Sharma says, "Man is a complex of intellect, will and emotion; he is a being who thinks, wills and feels" (33). All the three aspects of human nature make a hierarchy in the evolution just with the help of the three principles of Kabir's Bhakti to assimilate the unitive essence which in piquant manner Kabir holds save these paraphernalia the world remains only Maya. He believes:

The world: an ocean of desire.  
Ram's support: a ship.  
Take Hari's refuge: the sea will be  
as wide as a calf's hoofprint. (Trans. By Hess and Singh 81)

In Schopenhauer's philosophical quandary, there pessimism has been experienced overshadowing the reality in which the will to exist stimulates to desire for the best possible and, "He says that all life is suffering, because it is all striving, and all striving is suffering" (Patrick and Chapman

408). Kabir in his system of devotion hones and acuminates all fallacies to edifice striving as the only way to step into the valley of enlightenment and no element of hoariness due to human weakness in the judgement of things is possible therein. Kabir strongly overthrows ritualism and scholastic approach in the quest of reality and enlightenment since it is believed that they widen the density of Maya with more skepticism and wrong judgement. Therefore, on grass root level idol worship is the product of that effect regarding which the common faith goes in the sense that, "Idols might be an aid in developing one's power of concentration" (Chhabra 41). Kabir, however, as opposed to it severely goes to the extent to say:

Drop family, drop status,  
seek the nonexistent space,  
destroy the shoot, destroy the seed,  
reach the unembodied place. (Trans. By Hess and Singh 86)

Kabir's philosophy of evil, without a glitch, in unharrowing scheme, garners parallelism to the thought, according to which, "The problem of evil is the claim that existence of evil is incompatible with a God who is both omnipotent and a holy good" (Willows 2). For that reason, as espousing with others who hold that God is Omnipotent and God is all good and that there is no evil with him. Despite all this many a great high wits like J.S Mill, William James, Brightman and Taggart on the nature of evil and goodness fall to eschew God's Omnipotence; to some called Absolutists evil is just appearance and for the rest it partially acts as an instrument for the good or highest good. More interestingly, Charles Hartshorne and Whitehead, on the subject of the omnipotence of evil, give relative notion according to which:

...they mean to keep the infinite God intact and yet in certain respects hold him to be limited. God is said to be relative to the past which he cannot annul, to the freedom of actual occasions which he cannot control to the concretion of the physical world which he does not, theistically speaking, create. (Masih 289- 290)

This philosophical dryness gives no creative stuff of essence in theistically pantheistic view of God. Kabir thus believes also of evil not omnipotent as God it bears the degree of relationality with human consciousness and when consciousness begins to work, it fades away. Traditionally, Kabir's monotheistic omnipotence of good and evil are matters of the self which evince multidimensional shades of understanding in Indian philosophy. First Kabir's reactionary claim goes against the philosophical speculations and believes alike of the Nyaya theology according to which God, "is also the preserver of the world insofar as the world is kept in existence by the will of God" (Chatterjee and Datta 197). Kabir fundamentally stresses upon the subjective activation for the eternal consciousness which also is the Divine attribute however not essential in the way to come out of the cocoons of the illusion or Maya. To experience awe eternal of God every nook and cranny Kabir says:

The Supreme Soul is seen within the  
soul,  
The Point is seen within the Supreme  
Soul,

And within the Point, the reflection is  
seen again.  
Kabir is blest because he has this  
supreme vision! (Trans. By Tagore 51-52)

The highly prominent teaching that opens vistas of enlightenment is that striving is all that constitutes that quintessence which transcends the mercurial and mendacious nature of man wherefrom what comes before the mirror of inference is that nothing is all about fatalism. And as per the Divine law, since God is the Supreme Good, He does not allow infralapsarianism to exist. Here limpidly Kabir justifies the free will which is ardently defended by many mystics and philosophers as, "One solution proposed for the problem of evil is that evil is due to free created agents and that God cannot be held responsible" (Mautner 233). This all in poetry, Kabir purports thus:

The lock of error shuts the gate,  
open it with the key of love:  
Thus, by opening the door, thou shalt  
wake the Beloved. (Trans. By Tagore 86)

In a clear sense this Free Will means a choice of one alternative out of several possible options that prioritized one determines the states of good and evil, or the Heaven and the Hell. Kabir's agreement, without being abrasive snag, goes with causative and determinative nature of alternative and yet the choice of any particular leaving, the rest is free or ontological in sense. According to Rakesh Kumar Pandey, "His devotion was not of Saguna Bhakti as was of his guru but he was a pure Nirguna out and out. He preferred devotion to Pure Absolute Awareness (Satchitananda) as Infinite Existence (Sat) and Consciousness (Chit) and Bliss (Ananda)" (70). Devotion as such as striving or the state of striving foregrounding illumination is not at hand in absence of conscious freewill power. With Kabir one finds, "Unlike Near Eastern monotheistic religions, like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Indian and Chinese traditions tend to see evil as a feature of human actions, characters, or conceptualizations, rather than a part of the cosmic order or of cosmic processes" (Leezenberg 362).

### Conclusion

Kabir was a monotheist and was thus a follower of Shankara for Advaita School of monism. He believes evil as the product of dual conception of God which he wants to grapple with ecstatic love which forms the reality of his devotion or Bhakti believing that in the devotional development all the curtains of Maya are shed down and one happens to develop Rama Consciousness. This lesson of him is well mentioned in Srimad-Bhagavatam. He also believes reason, idea and other related things on the nature of God utterly false and believes the Saguna concept of God another form of evil instead a universal vision through which God is seen as formless or Nirgun is the only spiritual exercise with which man can curb the faith of multiplicity. In devotional practice man soars up to the highest levels of existential morality which constitutes goodness. In his theodicy he holds Satchitananda the only stage of elevation of human soul to ontological experience of unity of beings in an eternal scheme. Essentially, it is all dissociation from the original source that breeds maladroit picture of

differences material world. His Bhakti which is the way upward to shun away the evil is similar to the Bhakti-Rasamrata-Sindhu which comprises of causes of ecstasy called vibhava, the succeeding ecstasy called anubhava, the existential ecstasy called sattvika-bhava a truculent ecstasy called vyabhicari-bhava and lastly the eternal or progressive ecstasy called sthayi-bhava. At the last stage man happens to see all unity and oneness contained and controlling the whole. Therefore, evil to Kabir is a state of being unknown to the metaphysical reality of man, universe and God.

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