

Quest for Spirituality; Existence of ‘Kabir as God’ in Hindu Scriptures

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Abstract: The quest for God has been a central theme in human spirituality, manifesting in various religious and philosophical traditions through the ages. Spiritualism is part and parcel of human life. This paper explores the universal pursuit of the divine through the lens of Kabir and the existence of ‘Kabir’ in different literature. Though he was a 15th-century Indian mystic-poet, and his connections to Hindu religious scriptures is more or less dedicated to his work too. The quest for spirituality is a timeless journey that transcends cultures and religions. Among the mystical figures of India, Kabir stands out for his profound teachings that bridge Hinduism and Islam. While Kabir is revered as a saint and poet, his deification as “Kabir Parmeshwar” (Kabir as God) remains a topic of theological debate. This paper explores the concept of Kabir as a divine figure within the framework of Hindu scriptures and traditions, analyzing understand from his followers and mainstream Hindu thought. It aims to examine the spiritual underpinnings of this belief and its place in the broader quest for spiritual understanding of human mind.

Introduction

Spirituality often seeks to answer profound questions about existence of Gods or Supreme Being, the divine, and the purpose of life. Kabir, a 15th-century mystic poet, represents a confluence of Hindu and Islamic spiritual traditions. His verses challenge orthodox practices while offering a path of direct communion with the divine force. Though widely recognized as a saint, certain traditions, notably the Kabir Panth, and the followers of Kabir elevate Kabir to the status of God. This paper investigates whether Kabir’s deification finds support in Hindu scriptures and how this aligns with his teachings and broader spiritual movements with the time favours his connection to the Supreme God.

Historical Context

Kabir lived in a period of intense religious and social upheaval, marked by rigid caste hierarchies, struggle and conflicts between Hindu and Islamic ideologies. As a weaver by caste, Kabir's humble origins symbolized his rejection of elitism in spiritual practice. His teachings, primarily in vernacular Hindi, resonate with ideas of universal love, devotion, and inner realization. The Kabir Panth itself had emerged as a spiritual tradition dedicated to preserving and propagating his teachings, with a distinct emphasis on his divinity, and endless fruits received through the pure dedication.

Kabir in Hindu Scriptures

Kabir, generally holds a unique place in Indian religious and spiritual traditions. His theological perspectives transcend conventional boundaries, drawing from Hinduism, Islam, and his own distinct spiritual insights. The question of Kabir's divinity has been interpreted differently across various religious and philosophical schools, creating a rich tapestry of perspectives. Within the Hindu tradition, Kabir is often revered as a saint and considered an incarnation of the divine. Some sects, particularly followers of the Kabir Panth, view him as a form of God or an enlightened soul who descended to guide humanity. His emphasis on *bhakti* (devotion) aligns him with the broader Bhakti movement, where he is seen as advocating for a personal relationship with the divine, transcending rituals and caste divisions. Mainstream Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita, do not explicitly and expressly mention Kabir, as they predate his time. However, interpretations by Kabir Panth followers often draw parallels between Kabir's teachings and the descriptions of the "Supreme Being" (Parabrahman) in these texts. For example:

1. The *Rigveda* refers to a "Sat Purush" (Eternal Being) or the Supreme Being, which Kabir Panth interpreters associate with Kabir.
2. The Upanishadic concept of "Nirguna Brahman" (formless God) that aligns with Kabir's poetic emphasis on a formless, omnipresent divine.

Again according to Rigveda, Mandal 9, Sukta 1, mantra 9 and sukta 96, mantra 17 to 18, Rigveda mandal 9, Sukta 1, mantra 9:

"When the Supreme God, the immortal man, manifests himself in the form of a child while performing leela, at that time bachalor cow gives milk on it's own, by which that God is nurtured."

The holy Yajurveda, chapter 29, hymn 25, it is described that :

" Whenever society leave the way mentioned in the scripture and being treated arbitrarily, at that time Kabir God reveals the elemental knowledge."

According to holy Samveda, no. 1400, no. 359, chapter 4, 25, shalok 8 describes, the Kavirdeva "Kabir God come on earth with the elemental knowledge, he is the Supereme Being, and comes to break the fort of our karma, he is the provider of happiness and is most worthy worshipby all."

Kabir as Sat Purush The Kabir Panth regards Kabir as *Sat Purush* or *Supreme Divinity*, the eternal and ultimate reality that is also described in Vedic philosophy. This belief is deep rooted in Kabir's own proclamations and statements in his verses, where he identifies himself with the divine essence behind this universe.

Kabir and Bhakti Tradition The Bhakti Movement, to which Kabir belongs, emphasizes a personal, direct relationship with the divine, often bypassing intermediaries like priests or boycotts

the ritualistic performances. Kabir's elevation to divinity by his followers is seen as an extension of this movement's tendency and mental identity to personalize and internalize the divine. Though the other Hindu sects identify Kabir simply as a poet, but in his poetic language too there is deep message of divinity and how people could connect themselves to the Supreme power by following the path of purity and self discipline.

Kabir in Islam (A Sufi Saint) Among Muslims, Kabir is often regarded as a Sufi mystic who sought the essence of God beyond formal religious practices. His works emphasize the oneness of Allah and critique superficial adherence to religious dogmas. Kabir's teachings resonate with the Sufi ideal of divine love, where God is experienced through personal realization and inner transformation, furthering the notion of his spiritual divinity.

According to Surat Furkani chapter of the holy Quran Shareef, (no.25, Ayat 52 to 59), it has been said that "In reality (*Ibadahi kabira*), Kabir God (Allah) is worthy of worship. He is the same God who has created this universe in six days and on the seventh day coronated on his throne. Ask a knowledgeable person about it." In this context the narrator of Holy Quran Shareef is indicating towards another God named as 'Khabir' or 'Kabir.'

Kabir as a Spiritual Revolutionary of his Time Kabir's works challenge established theological norms, positioning him as a revolutionary voice against orthodoxy in both Hinduism and Islamic beliefs. His divinity is expressed through his rejection of institutionalized religion and his focus on the formless God (nirguna Brahma).

His repeated invocations of the divine in terms such as "Rama" and "Allah" emphasize a universal God beyond sectarian boundaries, reinforcing his identity as a spiritual guide rather than a deity.

The Key Scriptures and Interpretations of Kabir

The Bijak

The *Bijak*, a canonical text of the Kabir Panth, contains verses that directly reference Kabir's divine nature. Phrases like "Kabir is the creator of all" are often cited as evidence by his followers in this scripture.

Vedic and Upanishadic References

Indirect, Kabir's alignment with Vedic and Upanishadic ideas of the ultimate reality is emphasized in interpretative traditions:

Rigveda's hymns to the "Ekam Sat" (One Truth) resonate with Kabir's universalist vision.

The *Isha Upanishad's* notion of an all-encompassing divine presence echoes Kabir's formless God.

The Concept of Nirguna Brahman

Vedic/Upanishadic References: The Upanishads, especially texts like the *Mandukya Upanishad* and *Chandogya Upanishad*, describe *Brahman* as the ultimate, formless reality behind this universe (Nirguna Brahman), beyond attributes and sensory comprehension.

Kabir's Parallel: Kabir's poetry often glorifies the formless divine (*nirguna*), rejecting idol worship and emphasizing a personal, direct experience of God behind the creation. For instance, he says:

“*Avigat gati kachhu kahat na aavai*” (The state of the unmanifest cannot be described).

This alignment with the Upanishadic idea of Nirguna Brahman fosters the interpretation of Kabir as a divine voice or embodiment of this ultimate reality.

The Eternal Soul and Unity with Brahman

Vedic/Upanishadic Reference: The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and *Chandogya Upanishad* elaborate on the unity of *Atman* (soul) with *Brahman* (universal spirit), expressed in the phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* (“Thou art that”).

Kabir’s Parallel: Kabir often speaks of realizing the divine within oneself, echoing the Upanishadic pursuit of self-knowledge as the path to liberation:

“*Moko kahan dhunde re bande, main to tere paas mein*” (Why do you search for me outside? I am within you). This is the reality of God’s existence in all of us.

Such verses position Kabir as both a spiritual teacher and a reflection of the divine essence on earth.

Critique of Rituals and Emphasis on Inner Realization

Vedic/Upanishadic Reference: The *Katha Upanishad* critiques external rituals and emphasizes internal spiritual understanding: “*The path to the Self is as sharp as the edge of a razor.*”

Kabir’s Parallel: Kabir rejects and evaluates external rituals and orthodox practices, focusing on inner realization:

“*Pothi padh padh jag mua, pandit bhayo na koye*” (The world died reading scriptures, but none became wise till).

In this his emphasis on internal transformation aligns with the Upanishadic wisdom tradition, reinforcing his role as a divine guide.

Divine Manifestation in Human Form

Vedic/Upanishadic References: While the Vedas and Upanishads primarily focus on abstract divinity, they also acknowledge divine manifestations in forms comprehensible to humans (*avatara* concept in later Vedic tradition).

Kabir’s Parallel: Kabir Panthis (followers of Kabir) often interpret and explain his life and teachings as a divine manifestation intended to guide humanity toward liberation. His teachings, grounded in compassion, sympathy and wisdom, reflect qualities attributed to divine figures.

Puranic Analogies: Some adherents draw symbolic parallels between Kabir and divine incarnations mentioned in the Puranas, though mainstream Hinduism generally does not equate Kabir with traditional avatars like Vishnu or Krishna.

Comparative Theology Comparative Theology and Kabir Kabir’s teachings harmonize the monotheism of Islam with the mysticism and devotional elements of Hinduism. His followers view this synthesis as evidence of his divine universality.

Kabir’s Critique of Orthodoxy: Kabir’s rejection of ritualism and dogma aligns with the Vedantic emphasis on knowledge and self-realization as paths to liberation, further supporting his identification with the divine.

Modern Reception and Controversy

The idea of Kabir as God remains a contested belief. Mainstream Hindu traditions primarily recognize him as a saint or spiritual guide rather than as a divine incarnation. The Kabir Panth, however, continues

to venerate him as the ultimate reality, maintaining the belief that his teachings offer a direct path to spiritual enlightenment.

Philosophical and Secular Interpretations of Kabir

Some scholars and thinkers view Kabir's divinity metaphorically, interpreting his teachings as a call to recognize the divine within oneself and others. This perspective position highlights his humanistic approach, where divinity is linked to self-realization and ethical living. Kabir's divinity remains a multidimensional concept shaped by diverse theological and cultural interpretations. Whether seen as a saint, a mystic, or an incarnation of God himself, his teachings transcend religious dogmas, emphasizing love, unity, and the formless divine. His legacy continues to inspire, challenging individuals to seek a higher truth beyond the confines of institutionalized religion.

Conclusion

The human quest and search for spirituality often leads individuals to reinterpret sacred texts and traditions, as seen in the deification of Kabir by his followers. While Hindu scriptures do not explicitly validate the notion of Kabir as God, interpretations within the Kabir Panth offer compelling parallels between his teachings and Vedic philosophy. Kabir's role as a unifying spiritual figure and a critic of orthodoxy ensures his continued relevance in the quest for spiritual understanding.

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