


Sant Kabir, Tulsi, and Krishna: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine of Karma and Philosophy of Life

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical analysis on the comparative study of Sant Kabir, Tulsi and lord Krishna's doctrine of Karma and the philosophy of life. The mystic poet- Sant Kabir in his works, Goswami Tulsidas in his *Ramcharitmanas*, and Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, describe their doctrine of karma and their philosophy. Obviously, all the three figures from distinct historical and philosophical traditions—Krishna representing the Vedic and Upanishadic spiritual wisdom of karma, jnana, and bhakti, Tulsidas representing his staunchest devotion to lord Ram, and Kabir representing the Bhakti and Sufi influences look bifurcated on the fundamental spiritual principles. Krishna propounds karma as selfless action (Nishkama Karma) performed without expectation of due results. He raises points for duty (Dharma) according to cosmic order, emphasizing devotion (Bhakti), knowledge (Jnana), and disciplined action (Karma Yoga) as pathways to liberation (Moksha). His philosophy focuses on the realization of the Supreme Self (Brahma) and blind submission to the divine will, going beyond worldly illusions of human need and greed (Maya). Tulsi is of the view that everything is to be done according to the layout prepared by lord Rama. Tulsi is of the view that the word is action-oriented and says that as you sow so shall you reap. Kabir, on the other hand, criticises ritualistic practices and social divisions, urging individuals to seek inner realisation of the Divine through love and direct experience of one's own. He perceives karma as an internal force which creates human destiny but at the same time he believes in the transformative power of devotion and self-awareness over mere actions. His philosophy is beyond religious dogma, more with formless, omnipresent God (Nirguna Brahman) that can only be realized through personal spiritual awakening. This study highlights their philosophical intersections and differences towards life, revealing how their teachings provide profound insights into the nature of karma and life.

Keywords: *Sant Kabir, Bhagavad-Gita, Tulsi, Krishna, Ramcharitmanas.*

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Kabir's Karma Theory, Refutation of Fatalism: Importance of Karma

Kabir Das was an important poet of the Indian saint tradition, whose time is considered to be in the 15th century. He was one of the main promoters of the Bhakti movement and emphasized on Nirgun Bhakti. Kabir, through his Sakhis and couplets, deeply attacked the ignorance, superstition, and hypocrisy prevalent in the society. Knowledge, devotion, and karma have special importance in his thoughts. Kabir considered karma to be the basis of human life and he clarified that a person gets the fruits of his karma only. According to him, karma decides the direction of a person's life and leads him to salvation or bondage. Whatever happens with us is based on our actions, therefore we need not worry about why something pleasant or unpleasant comes our way.

According to Kabir, karma is the basis of life. He rejects fatalism and says that a man gets the same fruit as the karma he does. He also said that no God or incarnation can free a man from his karmas. Man, himself should be aware of his deeds and move towards good deeds. Kabir has clarified that if a person does bad deeds, he should not expect good results because bad deeds are destined to provide bad consequences. He himself was from a subaltern society, those days considered to be of lower state of human beings, but he gave such things no value, rather felt pride in whatsoever form he had been sent by God. Being a julaha by profession, he himself went to market for selling woven clothes and thread but unlike other tradesmen, he did it for a limited earning. His main idea revolves around deeds for human welfare, such deeds as help both, the doer and other dwellers of the world.

Besides differences in approach, both Krishna, Tulsi, and Kabir advocate for detachment, surrender, and concentrated focus on the divine. Krishna is of the view that right action must be taken peacefully with duty, whereas Kabir stresses inner purity and devotion beyond a set method of religion. Kabir clearly said that nothing happens by fate and chance, everything is determined by deeds. He considered fatalism to be ignorance and considered karma to be supreme. He teaches us that karma is more important than fate and we should always engage in good deeds. He also tells us that selfless deeds and fulfilling responsibility towards society is the true religion. These thoughts of Kabir are relevant even today and inspire us to follow the right path. Kabir teaches us that we should do every deed of ours thoughtfully otherwise we shall have to suffer its consequences in the future. In other words, it would be logical to say that he believed that man is the maker of his own destiny. In giving such rational points, we should not be confused about his theism, we must never estimate that he was against the view that God is the creator of everything.

In this world of religion and spiritual pursuit, man mostly searches for a prop to get a solution to all the evil deeds performed by him. Thus, spiritual rituals and religious dogma seem very satisfactory approaches. Kabir thinks that prevention is better than cure and in fact, there is no cure for sin. It is better to have chosen the right path of karma which considers all as equal and loving for one another and furthers the path for a positive fortune.

Relation between Karma and Moksha

According to Kabir, moksha also depends on karma. He says that only by performing worship and rituals one cannot attain moksha, but only by doing good deeds can a person move towards moksha. His ideals might appear quite hard to his followers, but they are true in every point when checked and followed in life. According to him, if a person stays in contact with people with virtues and does good deeds, he also becomes pure like them and eligible to attain moksha. Kabir believed that doing good takes a person to a higher state, while bad deeds lead him to downfall. Kabir laid special emphasis on selfless Action (action without selfishness). He says that a person should do action without worrying about the result, and it will be auspicious.

Kabir did not see action only from a spiritual point of view but also linked it with social reform. He says that a man should establish equality, humanity, and justice in the society through his actions. He said that higher state comes from higher deeds, not from higher lineage. The greatness of a man is not measured by his birth, but by his deeds. Just by taking birth in a high family, a person may not become great just as there is no guarantee that there will be only nectar in a golden pot because it may also contain poison. He says that a man should not be evaluated by his caste, clan, or society, but by his deeds and thoughts.

Sant Kabir has repeatedly described deeds as paramount in his couplets and hundreds of such statements by him place karma above all. In this regard he is of the view that a person should be identified by his knowledge and work. Just as the value of a sword is due to its edge and not its sheath, similarly the identity of a man is due to his good karma. There are many examples in society where people born in ordinary families achieved greatness through their deeds. Personalities like Neta ji Subhash Chandra Bose, Chandrashekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh proved that the identity of a person is due to his hard work, thinking and deeds. On the other hand, there are many examples in history where people born in high families went towards downfall due to their wrong deeds therefore it is necessary to follow the right path. A man's life is meaningful only when he walks on the path of truth and honesty. People who undertook excellent tasks, got respect in the society, no matter where they were born. On the other hand,

people who follow the bad path also spoil the name of their lineage. Nothing happens by merely talking about lineage or religion, unless a person does something exemplary and praiseworthy. As Kabir says and preaches, the same teaching has been given in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well. Shri Ram is worshipped not because of his lineage, but because of his ideals and deeds. Karna is considered great not by birth, but because of his generosity and valour. Even in today's time, we need to understand that a person should be evaluated by his deeds, not by his caste or family. So, we should always follow the path of truth and goodness, because these are the things that give us real respect in society. In short, it can be said that Kabir wants to say that a person who detaches himself from the material world and lives peacefully completely devoted to good works, has attained moksha. The detachment from the worldly affairs while alive is, the true moksha. It is not a thing to be attained through a thorough study of *Vedas*, *Upnishadas* and, mythological books, also it is not a stage to be attained after death because he thinks the world itself is the Bhavsagar and one who separates himself from the beauty, riches, power and attraction of this world, gets actual liberation.

Patience and Action: Teachings of Kabir and Shri Krishna:

Kabirdas and Shri Krishna are two important personalities in the Indian philosophy tradition who inspired the society with truth, action, and patience. The following couplet of Kabirdas stands parallel to Krishna's statement that one should do his duty, its result will come on time. He makes it clear that patience and right time are required for the result of every work. Nothing is achieved in a hurry, but for that, one must make continuous efforts and wait for the right time. The same idea was presented by Shri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. That is, man has the right only on doing work, not on the result. This idea is the essence of *Karmayoga*, which inspires man to work without any desire.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥

(Shrimadbhagwadgita, lesson 2, shloka, 46 34)

Similarity of Thoughts of Kabir, Tulsi, and Shri Krishna

Both Kabirdas and Shri Krishna teach that man should focus on his work, not on its result. Kabir's couplet gives the example of a gardener who waters his plants continuously. But the fruit comes only when the right time comes. Similarly, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* that he should focus only on his duty and not worry about the fruit. Many times,

in life, we work hard but we do not get the result immediately. In such a situation, a person becomes impatient and sinks in despair. Tulsi also supports the same idea when he points out that the world is action-based, and one must taste fruits of his actions, whether good or bad. Therefore, Tulsi, Kabir and Lord Krishna teach that success comes gradually and we should be patient, in the same ways we should look before we leap. These ideas are very relevant even in the present times. Nowadays people want to get quick results, make money quickly, get quick success, gain instant fame. But the reality is that to achieve any big goal, one must do continuous work and wait for the right time. Result is ascertained by duty that is why if a student wants to score good marks in the examination, he must study regularly. If a farmer wants a good crop, he must sow the seeds and invest both time and hard work. Similarly, in life too, no work can be successful without patience and continuous effort. The thoughts of Shri Krishna teach us that when we work without any desire, we remain stress-free and do our work with full devotion. On the other hand, Kabir tells us that there is a fixed time for everything, so instead of hurrying, it is important to make continuous efforts. Even, Tulsidas, writes the same idea:

होइहि सोइ जो राम रचि राखा। को करि तर्क बढ़ावै साखा॥

(Geeta Press. Ramcharitmanas, Pg. 48)

Thus, both teach us that we should keep working and maintain patience. The fruit of success is achieved only when the time is favourable. If we stop working in a hurry to get the result or become impatient, we may deviate from our goal. Therefore, we should perform our duties, work hard, and trust God that when the time is right, success will come.

Tulsi Das in his Ramcharitmanas advocates the world being centered on karma therefore he says that as one enjoys the fruits of one's good deeds in the same way, one has to suffer for every bad deed. He also says that one does not go to the higher state of life just by accompanying great scholars and kings, it takes hard work and devotion for that. Secondly, a laborious person destroys his errors by his great deeds which finally makes him a great person. He adds another point that we should keep quiet even if we do not get result according to our good deeds because it might be that God himself wishes so. Although he stands in favour of action-based world but pays all the credit to lord Ram whom he worships as the creator of everything in the world.

Philosophy of Life

Kabir was a spiritual guru of Indian saint tradition whose words not merely guided the society, but also attacked social vices, religious dogma, and discriminatory approaches. His philosophy consists in love, devotion, truth, and ideal behaviour, as the supreme object of the world. He laid emphasis on searching the God in one's own inner self rather than move from pillar to post. Temples, pilgrimages, mosques, churches, other spiritual places, their statues will not help us in finding God because he lies within one's self.

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! (Tagore One Hundred Poems of Kabir 7)

Kabir's life was based on Karmayoga and he was clear that a person should only pay attention to his actions, which is liable for the consequence. He considered it wrong to depend on luck and trusted that hard work and patience are the basis of the successful life. If someone sows thorns, he will get thorns, it is meaningless to expect mangoes. Similarly, he also explained the importance of patience and time and said that it is necessary to wait for the right time to get anything.

Kabir considered truth to be the basic need of life. He used to say that truth is the greatest tenacity and lies are the biggest sin. The truthful person does not need any other means, because the truth takes him in the right direction. He strongly opposed the show and hypocrisy and believed that only external worship would be nothing, until the person's mind would be pure. He said that if the mind is filled with truth and love, the biggest worship becomes. Kabir was a strong supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity. He criticised the traditions of external appearances of both religions and clearly stated that there is no need to go to the temple or mosque to get God, but it is necessary to make the mind clean. He used to denounce discrimination of caste standard outright. He believed that all the human beings are equal, and true saints are the ones who see every person equal. He considered simplicity and satisfaction as the greatest happiness of life. He used to say that the person needs some money so that he can take care of himself and his family, but he should not be greedy. According to him, a person becomes turbulent by greater greed and a satisfactory person is truly happy man. Kabir's philosophy is as relevant today as he was in his time. He was also against the practice of animal killing by the Muslims therefore he said that keeping fast i.e. Roza at day is useless, if they continue to kill cow at night. At the same time, he questions us that a goat eats nothing but leaves and they excoriate and kill her, what will happen to human beings who eat a goat itself? He strongly laid emphasis

on vegetarianism, so that one must not take the life of other living creatures as their life is dear to them as ours is to us. This very idea of Kabir reflects the basic principle of Jainism, 'Live and let Live'. His thoughts teach us that religion lies not only in external activities, but in good deeds, love and truth. His message still shows society the path of morality, love, and unity, so that we can live an ideal and peaceful life. Kabir was undoubtedly against hypocrite practices and did not like people different in words and actions. He always preached people to be compassionate towards other living beings and practice true love towards them. He urged the need to have company of good people that adhere to values and principles. He supported the idea of simple living and high thinking that was advocated by the Sufis. Kabir's poetry is a presentation of his philosophy about life. His writings were mainly based on the concept of reincarnation and karma. Kabir's philosophy about life was very clear-cut and he believed in living a very down to earth life.

Tulsidas's philosophy of life is a wonderful mingling of Indian culture, devotion, and social reform like Kabir, but it is not associated with all the sects and religions. His thinking is for the welfare of the people, in which the progress of the individual, society and the nation lies. Tulsidas incorporated spirituality and practical life in his poetry, due to which his philosophy presents a balance of reality and ideal. Tulsidas's devotion was centered on Ram, but his devotion was not only emotional, rather it contained a deep element of ethics, religion, and social reform. He considered devotion as a means of salvation, but did not see it only as personal, but as a form for the welfare of the people. According to him, Ram is not just a historical character, but a symbol of dignity, ethics, and religion. That is why he gave direction to the common people to live their lives through Ramcharitmanas. Tulsidas attacked the evils prevalent in the society and emphasised on the establishment of moral values. He was a supporter of the Varnashram system but was in favour of giving equal rights to every section of the society for devotion to God and religious conduct.

Tulsidas's philosophy of life was full of compassion, kindness, and tolerance. He believed that the purpose of human life is not only to get worldly comforts, but to purify the soul and attain God. He believed that man should follow his duties and have unwavering faith in God. The form of the ideal king, subjects, guru, disciple, woman, son, friend, and servant is clearly reflected in his poetry. He considered religion and justice to be essential for the state. His concept of Ramrajya is important not only from religious but also from social and political point of view, in which there is a place for equal opportunity, justice and harmony for all. His philosophy of life not only inspires one to be absorbed in devotion but also teaches man to be

a hard worker. He believed in the principle of "Karma Pradhan Vishwa Rachi Rakha", in which there is no place for fatalism and inaction. He considered life to be full of struggle but also said that every difficulty can be overcome with patience, self-control, and faith in God. Tulsidas's philosophy of life is relevant even in today's time. His teachings inspire a person to be alert towards morality, ideals, devotion, and duty. The path he showed to make human life successful in the true sense will continue to guide the society for ages.

Lord Krishna is of the view that one must follow the discipline of duty, devotion, wisdom, and yoga. In his preaching of the Gita, he gives a moral and spiritual guidance to Arjun and thereafter motivated him to be ready for the religious war. According to his Karma Yoga, man must do selfless action and leave its result to God. Further, in his Bhakti Yoga, he says that devotion to God is the easiest way to salvation but it must be devoid of all the material need and greed. In his Gyan yoga, he explains the concept of *atma* i.e. soul which is immortal and invincible. It neither takes birth, nor dies. Neither anybody kills anyone, nor is anybody killed. Krishna, further says that one must follow his dharma howsoever difficult it may be. Our work must be our priority, but we must maintain detachment from material desires and the fruits of our actions. He stresses that true knowledge gives us power and perseverance. It gives us concentration towards our set goal therefore we must always seek true wisdom. In performing all the above duties, we must never go against dharma i.e. we should be bound to the discipline of truth, honesty, and humanity. Kabir is quite strong in his opinion about karma as the creator of future and openly says that as we do, we get the same kind of material. Work is worship and we keep on moving one birth to another tied in the thread of karma.

Kabir highlights that love is the only means by which the entire human race can be united into an unbreakable chain of fraternity and brotherhood. He implores everyone to let go of animosity and continue to love one another thinking that we share the equal portion of the world assets. He emphasised the importance of being in the company of decent people who sustain high ideals and ethics. Kabir was basically sad for the entire humanity which was entangled in the trap of maya. It is true that a man of materialistic approach may never think about others like Sant Kabir. He will have to discard material and worldly greed of gain and loss because it is maya that gives birth to all the types of lust. According to him, *Maya*, with its four sons, *kaam*, *krodh*, *mada*, *lobh* is the root cause of all the dogmatic practices which creates social discrimination based on high and low, rich, and poor, powerful, and weak. In the same chain, Kabir considers rituals as one of the basic dogmas which disconnects man from purity of soul, God, and his real devotion.

The truth, Sant Kabir talks as dharma is basically found in every religion, but this truth has been dismantled by myth and negative beliefs resulting in casteism and sectarianism. Such a man as denounced earning money more than his need for basic life could be none but Kabir. It is said that he was a strong opponent of hoarding money and when his son Kamal, started earning a lot, he became sad that his own son was lost in sheer materialistic achievements. Kabir's philosophy moves around his practical knowledge, his own inner discovery, not around the books and shastras of religion, *Vedant*, *Upnishad*, or mythology. Kabir denounced pride and selfishness. He wanted man to give up pride, anger, enmity, and ego. He taught to merge in God just like the drop of water in the ocean losing your individual identity or ego.

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