Kabir in the Guru Granth Sahib:
A Bakhtinian Perspective

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Kabir's discourse is one of the predominant social voices of the Guru Granth (the Sikh Scripture). Contrasting with its overall poetic nature, Kabir's discourse predominantly manifests the socio-historical overtones fully marked with polemical and contesting historicity The present paper aims to establish that the poetic discourse of Kabir is socially multi-accented and dialogic, consistent with the Bakhtinian postulates of unitary, monologic, "authoritarian" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 287) and "dogmatic" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*,287) nature of poetic genres.

    Bakhtin postulated that poetic genres, unlike prose genres or novelistic discourse, can be understood as self-contained entities which intentionally do not allow other languages or "worldviews" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 297) to fertilize in its poetic "soil" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 325). This paper contends that Bakhtin's dogmatic and rigid views on the poetic genres are disputable and need reformulation. However, the study uses Bakhtin's own framework of polyphony and heteroglossia to validate Kabir's multi-accentuality. The present study argues that Kabir's poetic compositions are intensely polyphonic and decentralized. Kabir employs both different and divergent voices, making his poetic utterances multi-voiced and dialogic.

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Kabir, a weaver by profession, was born in Varanasi sometime between the late 14th and the early 15th century, the period when the devotional movement known as *bhakti* was taking hold in northern India. His poetic compositions, contributing to this movement, place him among the most important of sants, or "poet-saints," of the period.

Superficially, the poetic nature of Kabir's discourse stands contrary to Bakhtin's postulates of unitary, monologic, "authoritarian" (*DI* 287) and "dogmatic" (*DI* 287) nature of the poetic genres. Bakhtin postulated that poetic genres, unlike prose genres or novelistic discourse, can be understood as self-contained entities which intentionally do not allow other languages or "worldviews" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 297) to fertilize its poetic "soil" (Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 297 and 325).

The present study takes issue with Bakhtin's monologic stand on poetic discourse, proposing that forth the poetic compositions of Kabir, with all their richness of socio-historical references, are very much polyphonic and multi-voiced if examined from Bakhtin's perspective of heteroglossia and polyphony. Kabir employs both different and divergent voices which make his poetic utterances multi-voiced and dialogic. Bakhtin's theoretical postulates of heteroglossia and polyphony can facilitate visualization of the divergent and contradicting voices of the Bhakti period as embedded within the social discourse of Kabir as incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The notions of heteroglossia and polyphony outline the dialogic contours of the Bhakti period where plurality of voices constantly reaccentuate and resound with important socio-historical and theological contexts. Plurality of voices and consciousnesses, as Bakhtin's theoretical conceptions of heteroglossia and polyphony explicate, criss-cross and dialogically intersect through contextual horizons and thematic junctures. With these aspects of Bakhtinian criticism in view, the present paper will outline the general definition of heterglossia and polyphony along with other categories of Bakhtin's theories, to validate and authenticate Kabir's discourse as multi-voiced and polyphonic both in the Guru Granth Sahib as well as in the historical *bhakti* epoch.

The Guru Granth, as an important social-historical document (Sadarangini 166) of the Bhakti period, preserves the polyphonic and heteroglot contents of Kabir and other speakers. The present study confines itself, however, to the discourse of Kabir for polyphonic externalization, recognizing that consideration of the entire Guru Granth is beyond the scope and strength of the present work. The paper will attempt to explicate the following proposals:

(a) Kabir's poetic voice is a decentralizing/centrifugal voice, in so far as it manifests varying social personalities. Such a variety of different voices contradicts Bakhtin's contention of "single personed hegemony" (*DI* 297) of the poet;

(b) Kabir participated personally in the polyphonic events of the Bhakti period, as attested by passages of his poetry that are incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Heteroglossia and Polyphony as dialogic models
Heteroglossia, polyphony, and double-voiced discourse are the key terms for Bakhtin's postulation of the concept of social discourse as intrinsic to

genres such as the novel, in which social conflicts and contradictions constantly reemerge as part of the social tensions of the historically becoming world (*DI* 259). "Verbal discourse," for Bakhtin, "is a social phenomenon" (*DI* 259) and all its formal and verbal categories must be studied in connection with what he terms "sociological stylistics," understood as a function of "metalinguistics" (*PDP* 182). By contrast, Bakhtin does away altogether with the abstract findings of literary stylistics (linguistics), which restricts its concern to the general aesthetics of a literary work, ignoring the social implications of discourse (*DI* 259).

Heteroglossia and polyphony, as indispensable and constant features of novelistic discourse, were traditionally ignored and suppressed by the monologic hermeneutics working as centripetal thought-systems (*DI* 260-261). The traditional and general forms of stylistic studies have undermined the inherent property of heteroglossia which is, in fact, a multi-styled and multi-voiced phenomenon (*DI* 262). Bakhtin formulates a metaphoric explanation to manifest the different dialogical links that are integral to the social spectrum of discourse:

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; these distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization - this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (*DI* 263)

Heteroglossia enriches social or the novelistic discourse by shifting the two traditional poles of linguistic and stylistic studies - the individual speaking personality and the unitary or singular speech act (*DI* 269). Language for Bakhtin is not a system of abstract grammatical categories; rather it divulges a property of stratified ideological values saturating social discourse with multiple views, opinions, judgments and thought-systems. Bakhtin, however, acknowledges how centripetal forces in language continue to restrain social heteroglossia from further expanding its multiplicity and dispersing social elements. Socio-political forces invariably attempt to purge the echoes of social heteroglossia from literary language; however, heteroglossia always tends to break into these sealed-off centripetal zones. The ruling socio-political forces tend to unify or centralize the verbal ideological world and thus to centralize the socio-political and cultural domains. Both the novel and social discourses in

history ultimately disperse these unifying forces of language and culture, thus making social heteroglossia a potential social phenomenon:

What is involved here is a important; in fact, a radical revolution in the destinies of human discourse, bringing about:

…the fundamental liberation of cultural-semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of single and unitary language, and consequently the simultaneous loss of a feeling for language as myth, that is, as an absolute form of thought. (*DI* 367)

If polyphony represents the coexisting or co-positioned, personalized or individualized, voices of people (characters) in a social discourse like the novel, then heteroglossia enriches its contexts with the multiple social languages and consciousnesses (collective and individual voices) of people. Heteroglossia, in fact, contains the elements of social dialects, low and high genres of literature, extraliterary genres of everyday language, letters, confessional writings etc., professional jargon, tendentious (critical) languages of literary or philosophical schools, languages representing various ages groups, generations, fashions, language of the authorities (juridical or legal) and so on (*DI* 262-263). The generic cohabitation does not produce mutual peace or passive coexistence among these languages.

Social languages consistently meet and contest each other in the contextual domain of the novel.

A paradigmatic author for Bakhtin's criticism was the Russian novelist Dostoevsky (1821-1881), the subject of a study by Bakhtin entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Polyphony in Dostoevskian representation reflects a great dialogue of his time (*PDP* 27) where he not only heard the contradictory and multileveled voices of his time but also participated in the contradictoriness of his epoch. Bakhtin's conception of polyphony and his subsequent exile can be well understood in his own time where the monologic "social realism" (Shepherd 146) of the Stalin era had developed tendencies to homogenize literature, culture and nation. Both the idea of polyphony and Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky were acclaimed for philosophical ingenuity and social implications of everyday life. Bakhtin senses these polyphonic echoes of Dostoevsky and his characters in his conception of sociological stylistics. Instead of seeing a mere meaningful play of ideas, themes or characters, Bakhtin finds polyphonic coexistence of personal voices of the characters, their own double-voiced discourses and the voices coming from the authorial and narrative compositions.

All in all, what results is a polyphonic confrontation of multiple authors giving their "philosophical statements" (*PDP* 5) which is nothing but the

autonomous subjective worlds of Dostoevskian characters and of Dostoevsky himself. Bakhtin, like Dostoevsky, instead of visualizing people, hears them and their polyphonic engagement. What makes Dostoevsky's novels polyphonic is the dialogic spatial positioning of his characters. Both Dostoevsky and Bakhtin recognize this idea of "plurality of consciousnesses" (*PDP* 6) as the chief characteristic of the human world. Michael Gardiner observes that their discourses constitute "a new way of looking at language and intertextuality both in literature and everyday life" (23). This idea of polyphony was finally ingrained into all his other major theoretical models including carnival, laughter, heteroglossia, chronotope and hybridization: ideas that Bakhtin continued to work out until his death in 1975.

Like Dostoevsky, Bakhtin sees the systems of language and culture as saturated with human voices and their inevitable inter-orientation leads to an inconclusive becoming. Moreover, Bakhtin asserts that an idea or an image inevitably inheres in its "historical traces" (Glazener 156), implying the accretions of meanings and propositions. Unlike Derridean indeterminacy of meaning, the word here, in Bakhtin, is personalized and positional; neither entirely private nor completely impersonal. It is born and lives as an intersubjective and interpersonal phenomenon- an "overpopulated" (*DI* 294) intention. Dostoevsky, as Bakhtin observed, lived in a world which bore the marks of "contradictoriness and multi-leveledness" (*PDP* 27) as a part of the social reality of his time. He derived and drew out the same multi-leveledness in his novelistic and critical approaches, arguing that there are no isolated or independent stages or planes; rather, only a single "dialogical" plane where all stages or human characters coexist as various "opposing camps" (*PDP* 27).

Dostoevsky did not see a single world or a reality in his novels; rather, he portrayed multi-forms of social reality and its worlds. He did not project his novels and the worlds depicted in them as expressions of his authoritative discourse or as a controlling force; rather, he participated in a world where other characters became counterparts with "equal rights and equal responsibilities" (*PDP* 292). Thus Bakhtin, like Dostoevsky, was intent on bringing out the multi-subjective worlds of people in language and texts, as cultural phenomena carrying the forces of "social tone" (*DI* 259) and "social dialogue*"* (*DI* 277). Apart from this, Dostoevsky's artistic method, as Bakhtin points out, employs uni-direction (stylization), vari-directional double-voiced discourse (all parodic and ironic transmission and narration), as well as active-type double-voiced discourse (hidden and

open polemic, sideward glance at others' words, hidden dialogue) (*PDP* 199).

Poetry as Monologic Form

In Bakhtin's view, unlike prose genres or novelistic discourse, poetic forms never represent the low generic language of people. Though Bakhtin's views on the monologic nature of poetry may sound narrow and conservative, the fact remains that such genres have always been elevated as elite, classic and fit for legends. Poetry in ancient Greco-Roman era became a standard linguistic medium to unify or centralize literary consciousness as well as the ideological world of the socio-political forces (*DI* 367).

Poetry thus structured itself as a centripetal force which governs itself as a self-sufficient and sealed off (*DI* 287) genre. Poetic language became a unitary language - a language of gods that had its roots in extra-historical abstraction (*DI* 331). Since it retained centralizing forces within its contextual structuring, it ultimately lost the social significance that inheres in novelistic discourse as socio-historical concreteness (*DI* 331). A poet loses all socially typical characterization and guises as "single-personed hegemony" (*DI* 297) For Bakhtin, a poet intentionally and carefully removes the signs of heteroglossia. A poet self-sufficiently makes his/her language unitary by purging the words directly or indirectly alluding to the other languages/voices/personalities/speeches (*DI* 297). A poet precisely "depersonalizes" (*DI* 291) all the words/utterances which refer to other genres, dialects, jargons, social groups and specific personalities:

The unity and singularity of language are the indispensable prerequisites for a realization of the direct (but not objectively typifying) intentional individuality of poetic style and of its monologic steadfastness. (*DI* 286)

Moreover, the poet remains a poet throughout his compositions, with a voice that remains thoroughly dogmatic, conservative, authoritarian (*DI* 287), monologic and unitary (*DI* 296), both in style and content. Moreover, the world rendered poetically is a one based on imagination and memory as opposed to the personal experience and thought of the novelist. Speaking of the epic poetic genre, Bakhtin finds it an official and closed entity (*DI* 17), conveying the authoritative and reified images of a prehistoric world. Epic poetry connotes a rigid, privileged and normative class bearing all hierarchical values and an "absolute past" (*DI* 21).   Unlike novelistic utterance, poetry does not open its object to other alien utterances or allusions. It remains bound to its normative conventions which do not

allow it to exchange voices with outside voices, e.g., allusions, references, historicity or linguistic styles (Jarma 27).

The Guru Granth as an embodiment of polyphony and heteroglossia: Some illustrations

One of the foremost concepts, for instance, which received polyphonic accents and assessments of individual sants and socio-religious groups is the doctrinal concept of *varnashramadharma* - a caste-based ideology traditionally legitimized and passed down through various important Hindu discourses and spiritual leaders. *Varnashramadharma*, grounded in the Vedas, conferred exclusive rights of Vedic studies and ritualistic practices on Brahmins. Both the *saguna* principle in general- the conception of God(s) having form- and individual Hindu Brahmins saw caste ideology and classification as natural and mandatory. Manusmriti (the Laws of Manu) accorded Brahmins socio-religious hierarchy (Buhler 24-26) over the lower classes as part of a sacred necessity.

Conferring such privileges and exclusivity led to the degradation of other lower classes in every sphere of human life, including social and religious. The sacred exclusivity of Brahmins over the others in this world and in the subsequent spiritual world (according to Vedanta philosophy) entirely compartmentalized the social fabric into various classes, castes and groups. This view did not go uncriticized, however: Exclusivity and sacred provisions granted to a single class were challenged and rejected from time to time. According to Amartya Sen, this this process of subversion and questioning of caste-based duties and rights constitutes part of inherent dialogic tradition of India based on "argumentation and disputation" (6).

Heterodoxy did not wait to reveal its subverting intentions in the later part of the Medieval History. Rather, it manifested the seeds of initial "rebellious religious movements" (10) during the development of Jainism and Buddhism nearly two millennia earlier. In the Medieval period, *varnashramadharma* was considered with heteroglot and polyphonic accents in the voices of Guru Nanak, and two sants, Kabir, and Ravidas. The three speakers separately accent their understanding of this concept and offer their personal ideological assessment. What one can see here is the personification of the voices of Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ravidas and the collective voices of Brahminic discourses.

The particular concept led to the dialogic and polyphonic dispersion of voices from different zones. It was not only the Brahmanic discourses which had endorsed the legality of caste discrimination. There were

contemporary Brahmin apologists who strenuously advocated for the legitimacy of such Vedic principles. Tulsidas (1532-1623), prominent among such advocates during the Bhakti period, consciously intervened in socio-religious dialogue by means of commentaries indicating his dialogic participation as important stakeholder and apologist for *varnashramadharma*. His references to other *bhakti* and *shudra* sants (Allchin 125) corroborate the fact of dialogical multiplicity of that time. As an orthodox Brahmin, Tulsidas's references to *shudra*s and their *bhakti* ideals confirmed his consternation and rage against such sectarian groups and individuals for infringing fundamental Brahminic ideals. Linda Hess quotes Tulsidas' negative views on the growing popularity of *shudra*s and other sants:

[In Kaliyug] women are masters, controlling men the way jugglers control dancing monkeys.
Shudras teach spiritual wisdom to Brahmans,
wear the sacred thread, and take wicked gifts ...
Shudras talk back to Brahmans: "We're not inferior to you!" ... and they glare defiantly.
People of the vilest castes-oilmen, potters, dog-eaters, tribal, distillers of liquor- when their wives die and their property is lost, shave their heads and become holy. (*PPWS* 245; Quoted from Ramacharitaramanas)

   From a Bakhtinian perspective, these Brahminic discourses can be understood as concrete and historical voices represented by individual contemporaries and the successive generations who had transmitted and endorsed the governing principles of Brahminism. One can hear in these collective forms of discourses a unified voice of its originators and other successive representatives. Bakhtin emphasizes the historicized and personalized voices and figures behind all collectively generated works of people:

A given work can be the product of a collective effort, it can be created by the successive efforts of generations, and so forth—but in all cases we hear in it a unified creative will, a definite position, to which it is possible to react dialogically. A dialogic reaction personifies every utterance to which it responds (*PDP* 184).

One can thus imagine the layering of voices both within historical *Bhakti* period as well as in the entire Guru Granth. The concept of *varnashramadharma* and its sub-categories become a zone of intersubjective debates with personalized accents of social discourses. One can hear the representative voices of Brahminsic discourses as well as the reaccentuating voices of Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ravidas, and other Gurus and sants incorporated in the Guru Granth. The caste ideology, reiterated through the successive generations of Hindus and their discourses, becomes a unified personality of all Brahmin Hindus. Apart from the direct transmission of this caste concept into Hindu discourses and practices, it was also transmitted in other non-Brahmin discourses which reaccentuate it ironically, mockingly, disapprovingly and so on. Ravidas, an untouchable of the *chamaar* (animal-hide dealer) caste, repeatedly re-accentuates the conception along with his Brahmin counterparts. His re-accentuation coexists with the re-accentuation of Brahmins:

It is my occupation to prepare and cut leather; each day, I carry the carcasses out of the city.
Now, the important Brahmins of the city bow down before me; Ravi Daas, Your slave, seeks the
Sanctuary of Your Name
(*Guru Granth*, 1293).

Elsewhere Ravidas writes:

Only You can grant Mercy to that person whose touch pollutes the world.
You exalt and elevate the lowly, O my Lord of the Universe; You are not afraid of anyone.
Naam Dayv, Kabeer, Trilochan, Sadhana and Sain crossed over.
Says Ravi Daas, listen, O Saints, through the Dear Lord, all is accomplished.
(*Guru Granth*,1106)

The polyphonic model works productively the more such voices penetrate into these themes and ideas. Kabir expresses similar irony and disapproval toward class distinction as well as Vedic superiority:

You are a Brahmin, and I am only a weaver from Benares. How can I compare to you?

Chanting the Lord's Name, I have been saved; relying on the Vedas, O Brahmin, you shall drown
and die.
(*Guru Granth,* 970)

A Bakhtinian understanding assists in seeing the transmission of the theme through various experiences, moods and intonations. What ultimately surfaces is the outcome of multiple intentions and accentual systems, which in fact facilitated the formation of the historical *Bhakti* period. The personalized and collective voices of Kabir, Ravidas and Brahminic injunctions of caste point to reverberations of thoughts and personal experiences. It is what Bakhtin stresses over the concrete living reality of the word/language. The word lives its life in the public zone, or what he regards as an intersubjective and trans-individual (*PDP* 88) zone of communication.

From this perspective, the multiple consciousnesses of *Bhakti* literature cannot be studied or viewed merely as separate incidents or partial double-voiced dialogism. Rather, they manifest a collective echo of the entire Bhakti period. These personalized and unified voices or consciousnesses cannot be separated from the *bhakti* background (spatio-temporal historicity) which ultimately preserved this great dialogue as a polyphonic expression of its speakers:

The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered. (*PDP* 202)

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), as an important historical contemporary, aligned his voice with Kabir and Ravidas in categorically subverting the premises of *varnashramdharma*. Though he had access to all Vedic injunctions and rituals, he nonetheless thoroughly deflated Brahminic precepts and departed from the idea of *varnashramadharma*:

Let the body be the Brahmin, and let the mind be the loin-cloth; let spiritual wisdom be the sacred thread, and meditation the ceremonial ring.
Praise as my cleansing bath.
By Guru's Grace, I am absorbed into God.
O Pandit, O religious scholar, contemplate God in such a way.

that His Name may sanctify you, that His Name may be your study, and
His Name your wisdom
and way of life.
(*Guru Granth*, 335)

   All such voices, personalized and collective, become the reigning
consciousnesses/discourses of the *Bhakti* period as well as an integral part
of the Guru Granth Sahib. The foremost themes of
varnashramadharama – structures of duty, dominance and subordination-
pass through various moods, intentions, experiences and utterances. Some
converge conceptually and some disperse each other as a sign of
disagreement and dissent. Bakhtin rightly claims that utterances, while
orienting towards their objects, find dialogic resistance and multiple routes
developed by other discourses or consciousnesses ((*DI* 279).
   Between utterances and its themes there exists an "elastic environment of
other alien words about the same subject, the same theme..." (*DI* 276). One
can also say that the language of the sants Sants becomes a sphere of this
rising polyphonic and heteroglot tension between the poets of *nirguna*
philosophy (conception of God(s) as formless) and the orthodox forces of
Brahminism. Guru Nanak, Kabir, and Ravidas enrich and stratify Sant
language with polyphonic and heteroglot overtones by intentionally
incorporating the voices or discourses of other socio-religious communities.

Polyphonic voices in Kabir's discourse
What makes Dostoevsky's novels polyphonic is the dialogic spatial
positioning of his characters. His characters can be seen as occupying
various "opposing camps" (*PDP* 27) confronting each other with their
"idea". Dostoevsky, too, takes one of the positions among his other
ideologue characters. What prompts his characters to adopt such
confrontational positions are their independent ideological stands.
Dostoevsky capably advances the idea, or theme, through the conscious
voices of his characters, which brings them to a dialogical plane. This plane,
in turn, becomes a striving stage of various "opposing camps" (*PDP* 27) in
which Dostoevsky constantly shifts his artistic vision. Polyphony does not
appear only as the intense interaction of character; it penetrates the inner
core of character's soul in the form of inner dialogue. Inner dialogue brings
forward characters' own opposing thoughts and self-confrontational
feelings.

Dostoevsky's chief characteristic is his projection of spatial dialogues. Dostoevsky visualizes action and discourse of his novels as is everything is happening in a space where everyone holds his position and draws others into dialogic confrontation in a single time frame:

Subjectively Dostoevsky participated in the contradictory multi-leveledness of his own time: he changed camps, moved from one to another, and in this respect the planes existing in objective social life were for him stages along the path of his own life, stages of his own spiritual evolution. This personal experience was profound, but Dostoevsky did not give it a direct monologic expression in his work. This experience only helped him to understand more deeply the extensive and well-developed contradictions which coexisted among people—among people, not among ideas in a single consciousness. Thus the objective contradictions of the epoch did determine Dostoevsky's creative work (*PDP* 27).

Kabir's utterances, too, manifest such "juxtaposition" or "coexistence" (*PDP* 28) of other ideological camps, such as Brahmanic, Muslim, Yogic, and the collective voice of people, thus implying ideological/collective voices as his conceptual object. Kabir's various themes correlate with a variety of ideological positions. These various worlds do not stand peacefully in the discourse: instead, Kabir activates them as opposing and divergent forces. As Dostoevsky does in developing the dialogic encounters of his characters, Kabir intentionally places his ideological world in front of other opposing camps in order to mark his ideological rupture and dissonance. The coexistence of such opposing voices in the discourse of Kabir enriches his poetic compositions as a "living" struggle of word and social life. Such ideological clash and opposition not only prompted the beginning of an important phase in the history of Medieval India, but also impacted and shaped the development of cultural demography and mindset of India.

Ideological voices/collective voices in Kabir:
Like Dostoevsky, Kabir is interested in playing with both reigning and non-reigning voices. He is not merely reporting the critical degradation of human life and aspirations: He highlights how all human attempts to realize self-awareness have failed, as they have relied on human holy books rather than self-realization. His self-transcendence as a common man defies all definition and doctrinal propositions of scriptures and authoritative

systems. His low caste status and illiteracy do not attenuate the impact of his dialogic discourse and cogent arguments.

Kabir's frequent allusions to the Vedas, Shastras, Katab (Semitic books), Yogis, Naths, Siddhas, Brahmins, Qazis, Shaivites, Vaishnava Bhaktas, common people, as well as to his own family members, are deliberate attempts to bring them all to the dialogical space of arguments and questioning. Kabir's rhetorical skills invigorate all voices as active and socially engaged. These voices do not act merely as imaginal or literary characters as they would in Dostoevsky's novels and narratives. Rather, they reflect Kabir's actual and authentic social experience, based on real and historically proven episodes and human events. These different and striving world views do not stand merely as products of objective observation; rather they speak for themselves as subjective/representative voices. Kabir does not stand outside this dialogical landscape of his discourse: he holds a position of a powerful interlocutor and active participant. Vaudeville and Partin describe Kabir's polemical participation as one of the dialogical characters in the social dialogue of his time:

This satire is brought to bear not simply on the vices and weaknesses of men but reaches in them and behind them to the systems themselves which they defend or pretend to represent. It is the authority of the Veda and the Quran, as much and even more than the Pandit or the Qazi, that Kabir attacks, or, more precisely, he rebels against the pretension of resolving by means of "books" or by way of authority the mystery of the human condition and the problem of salvation (193).

Seen through a Bakhtinian lens, all such references are active and living words or images. Kabir does not allow the spark of social collision to die in his social narrative. He consistently maintains and displays the dialogic polemics and social struggle of his word. Like Dostoevsky he shows full dexterity in drawing out the various social personalities and positions in his discourse. His voice, like Dostoevsky's does not merge with other social personalities or consciousnesses. Kabir responds to the dialogue which had begun with the preexisting voices of Hindu and Muslim discourses:

The four Vedas blossom forth in duality.
The Simritees blossom forth, along with the Koran and the Bible.
Shiva blossoms forth in Yoga and meditation.
Kabeer's Lord and Master pervades in all alike.

The Pandits, the Hindu religious scholars, are intoxicated, reading the Puraanas.
The Yogis are intoxicated in Yoga and meditation.
The Sannyaasees are intoxicated in egotism.
The penitents are intoxicated with the mystery of penance.
All are intoxicated with the wine of Maya; no one is awake and aware. (*Guru Granth,* 1193)

Bakhtin's methodology will explicitly assist in identifying the dialogical positioning of multiple ideological voices present as representative classes and authoritative groups in the above lines by Kabir. As Vaudeville and Partin note, the dialogical addresses to Pandits and Qazis are basically made to reach out and penetrate to the representative and authoritative voices of the system (193). His rejection of the Vedas and the Katab (the Semitic holy books), his condemnation of Pandits and Yogis for relying on doctrinal ways fill his discourse with the living voices of other discourses and ideological judgments (opposing camps).

Kabir finds that all religious and scriptural traditions that claim to uplift human experience are actually themselves caught in the imprisonment of duality and maya (delusion). Kabir reveals the failure of such traditions through his discourse and dialogic voice. Kabir's allusions to Yogis (Shaivites), Pandits, the Katab, the Vedas and the Smritis reveal their representative ideological voices/world views as different and opposing positions against which he projects his ideological voice of self-awareness and interior realization. They had already expressed their words through their respective discourses and practices before Kabir. Now, it was Kabir's turn to take a dialogical position against all such authoritative texts, groups and sects.

Kabir intentionally weaves the polyphonic environment of dialogue in a way that all such authoritative texts and their representative classes re-emerge from the background to take up their positions. All these references to other ideological worlds and representatives reflect Kabir's co-positions in his social narrative. While addressing such external positions, his voice, too, becomes charged with his celebrated *bhakti* ideals. Significantly, such external positions are not the imaginal characters; rather they are the real and actual yogis and other people. Moreover, as Vaudeville and Partin assert (193), Kabir's word penetrates to the world of preexisting authoritative discourses through the representatives of these discourses. What connects all these worlds with the common dialogical thread is the

orientation of Kabir's discourse towards these various external representatives which occupy different spatial positions in the dialogical plane of Kabir's discourse. Bakhtin clarifies these dynamics in his explanation of the dialogic orientation towards the other living discursive elements within the conceptual horizon of a discourse:

Dialogic relationships are possible not only among whole (relatively whole) utterances; a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice. (*PDP* 184)

Such juxtapositions and coexistence of divergent voices/ideological worlds is predominant in Kabir's discourse, and it is deliberate. Kabir's representation of Hindu and Muslim ideological worlds through his language conspicuously presents the dialogical confrontation taking place among many stakeholders among whom he was also one of the participants:

If the Lord Allah lives only in the mosque, then to whom does the rest of the world belong?
According to the Hindus, the Lord's Name abides in the idol, but there is no truth in either of
these claims.
O Allah, O Raam, I live by your Name.
Please show mercy to me, O Master.
The God of the Hindus lives in the southern lands, and the God of the Muslims lives in the west.
So search in your heart- look deep into your heart of hearts; this is the home and the place where
God lives.

The Brahmins observe twenty-four fasts during the year, and the Muslims fast during the month of Ramadaan.
The Muslims set aside eleven months, and claim that the treasure is only in the one month.
What is the use of bathing in Orissa? Why do the Muslims bow their heads in the mosque?

If someone has deception in his heart, What good is it for him to utter prayers? And what good is it for him to go on pilgrimage to Mecca?
You fashioned all these men and women, Lord. All these are Your Forms.
(*Guru Granth*, 1349)

Kabir's social sarcasm penetrates the core of the ideological principles of other worldviews. Kabir's ironic and dialogic overtones penetrate the vocatives of "Allah" and "Ram" with the voice of self-realization. The allusions to "Allah" and "Ram" are more than mere referents to Muslim and Hindu faith. Kabir seeks to purge and penetrate these terms with his own self-understanding, in order to liberate them from the confinement of places, idols and geographical bounds. Through these two words/terms, Kabir activates and animates the ideological worlds of Hindu and Muslim communities and projects a polyphonic spectrum of plural voices.

Many divergent and colliding worlds are mobilized in Kabir's discourse. All definitions, acts, characteristics, experiences and practices of these two different worlds are reenacted through the images of rituals and practices which ultimately- Hindu and Muslim, both -intersect with the agitating and questioning discourse of Kabir. Far from seeking to synthesize all these divergent worlds into one; he delves deeply into thenm to strike at the ritualistic and territorial identities of these multiple worlds:

It is therefore rather inaccurate to represent Kabir as a reformer of Hinduism, or even as an apostle of religious tolerance and of Hindu-Muslim reconciliation. Undoubtedly, he loves to repeat that "the Hindu and the Turk are brothers," since God is present in all. But this reform is a final condemnation, and this tolerance is supported by a kind of rationalism which rejects absolutely every revelation based on an authority extrinsic to the human soul. (Vaudeville and Partin 193).

Kabir does not stop at the ideological belief systems of Hindu and Muslim discourses; rather he draws in other ideological voices/discourses that, in his view, pretend to be perfect and absolute in harmonizing human suffering and deliverance goals. The polyphonic play of coexisting voices in the dialogical plane of Kabir's utterance once again characterizes his poetic tone as socially polemic. Kabir juxtaposes all ideological voices together to bring out the inherent heterogeneity of the social world of his time:

If Yoga could be obtained by wandering around naked,
then all the deer of the forest would be liberated.
What does it matter whether someone goes naked, or wears a deer skin, if
he does not remember the Lord within his soul?
If the spiritual perfection of the Siddhas could be obtained by shaving the
head, then why haven't sheep found liberation?
If someone could save himself by celibacy, O Siblings of Destiny, why then
haven't eunuchs obtained the state of supreme dignity?
Says Kabeer, listen, O men, O Siblings of Destiny: without the Lord's Name,
who has ever found salvation? (*Guru Granth,* 324)

Once again various themes, such as salvation, divine fulfillment and self-
awareness, pass through the various points of view and ideologies. Bakhtin
himself posits such indispensable condition of all social languages:

Everywhere a specific sum total of ideas, thoughts, and words is passed
through several unmerged voices, sounding differently in each (*PDP* 278).

Kabir's discourse illustrates the multi-levelness of such points of view
through its linguistic images and stylistic tone. This predominant idea of
deliverance and awareness in all such divergent and opposing views
(polyphonic) animates a play of meaningful discourse. Kabir intentionally
and carefully weaves these living elements to generate a point of argument
and mockery. The three worlds of Yogis, Siddhas and (Hindu) celibates
collide with the mocking voice of Kabir. Kabir satirically denounces such
ideas of awareness and human deliverance with his mocking tone. His
position of a satirist and laughing personality interacts with his external
positions (Yogis, Siddhas and celibates) as Kabir portrays them as other
subjective characters.

Conclusion
Bakhtin's dialogic criticism allows for generation of a renewed
understanding of the *bhakti* dialogue as part of polyphonic and heteroglot
positions of texts and popular voices. The Guru Granth, as the foremost
historical and religious document of the Bhakti period, authenticates and
substantiates the heteroglot and contesting discourses characteristic of the
period, in which voices across regions, languages, and cultures participate
individually and through traditions. Kabir's voice is not only an integral
part of the Guru Granth, it also resounds as one of the polyphonic and

contesting voices of that period. His voice is polyphonic, multi-generic (yogic terminology and conversational dialects) and popular, incorporating both sarcasm and humor.

Undermining Bakhtin's monologic views on the position of a poet as a hegemonic and "single-personed" authority (*DI* 297), Kabir's discourse displaces and disregards any such Bakhtinian constraints of monologic discourse. The *Bhakti* period in general and the discourse of Kabir in particular foreground public debates and historicity of plural consciousnesses. In the form of discourse, their consciousnesses are stratified and exhibit multileveled horizons. In the case of Kabir's discourse, the references to the Vedas, the Smritis, the Semitic books, Brahmans, Pandits, Qazis, Vaishnavas, Yogis are intentionally positioned as opposing subjects. They are enlivened by the intensity of address and engagement of Kabir.

The polyphonic structure and the double-voice discourse proposed by Bakhtin are well evident and functional in Kabir's work. His discourse attempts to bring all these differing voices at the discursive space of his poetry where all opposing worlds converge on the dialogic plane. His entire discourse can be taken as a landscape of polyphonic dialogue as well as a space of micro-dialogue (double-voice discourse). What finally emerges is Kabir's non-reconciliation (Vaudeville and Partin 193) and constant collision with other opposing worlds- a primary condition of dialogue that Bakhtin calls "unmerged voices" (*PDP* 278). All in all, a sign of historical continuity is inherent in Bakhtin's voice, as well as others in the Guru Granth Sahib.

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