

Turning Within: Lal Ded's Journey from Illusion to Divine Consciousness

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ABSTRACT:

Lal Ded, the fourteenth-century Kashmiri mystic poet, occupies a distinctive position in the spiritual and literary history of medieval India. Her vakhs constitute a profound exploration of the human journey from worldly attachment and illusion to inward awakening, self-realisation and union with the Divine. This paper examines Lal Ded not merely as a religious mystic or a social rebel, but as an awakened consciousness whose rejection of established social, religious and patriarchal conventions emerges from her experience of spiritual freedom and non-duality. Her insistence on turning within, questioning external ritualism and recognising Shiva as omnipresent reveals a conception of divinity that transcends narrow sectarian boundaries.

The paper studies selected vakhs through four interconnected stages—Life of Illusion, The Search, The Realisation and The Way—to trace the progressive movement from maya and worldly attachment towards the realisation of the higher Self. Particular attention is given to Lal Ded's unconventional life, her rejection of socially imposed notions of female identity and her poetic challenge to religious authority. The study also brings her philosophy into dialogue with contemporary ideas concerning consciousness, interconnectedness, vibration and dimensions of reality. Concepts drawn from modern physics are employed here as interpretive metaphors rather than as empirical proof of mystical experience. Such an interdisciplinary approach opens a space for examining how mystical traditions and contemporary scientific thought differently approach questions of reality, perception and consciousness.

The paper ultimately argues that Lal Ded's enduring relevance lies in her radical movement from external conformity to inner freedom. Her vakhs transform rebellion into awakening and individuality into the recognition of universal consciousness, making her spiritual vision relevant beyond the historical, religious and cultural boundaries of medieval Kashmir.

KEYWORDS: *Lal Ded, Lalleshwari, Vakhs, Kashmir Shaivism, Mysticism, Divine Consciousness, Self-Realisation, Maya, Non-Duality, Spiritual Awakening, Gender and Spirituality, Consciousness Studies, Mysticism and Science.*

Lal Ded was a female saint of Kashmir, during the 14th century, who attained oneness with the Divine Consciousness, "the Parabrahma". Her entire life was a means to distribute her spiritual message coming from the enlightened soul who could very easily see through past and present. Maya could not hold her and religion couldn't bind her. She was ready to break all set beliefs or illusions regarding the God or Allah. Just like Kabira she took no time in responding to the ignorant people and through her "vakhs" dispel the darkness around.¹ Her

spontaneous overflow of 'vakhs' seemed to be a direct message of the ultimate divinely power. She was different and spiritually ahead of Mira Bai because she moved naked without a spec of fear or shame.² In a way she stands equal to Akka Mahadevi or Habba. All her vakhs were like strikes of matches that burnt the ignorant actions of the so called pandits. Hence, she is generally termed as a rebel but the truth is that a truly awakened person is automatically a rebel of all that is false and untruth. Only an awakened person can ask such questions to Pandit about her relationship with her own child whom she is going to marry in her several short rebirths in the animal kingdom. She lived a balanced life fully aware that life gives you flower and thorns in equal amount. The only need is to accept those

without a sense of sadness or happiness.

"Pleasure and pain became alike to me;
praise and blame lost their power."

Words of praises or words of scorn, hurled upon her, failed to affect her. Neither her mother in law's rebukes nor the attack of her husband could disturb her peace of mind. Due to her vakhs she is still revered like kabir in the valley of kashmir by Muslims and Hindus. One calls her

Lalleshwari and another Lalla Arfa. Many articles have tried to explore her as follower of Shaiv Dharma or an observer of Sufism but the truth is that she was none of them. She was an old soul who has from her previous many births being practicing yoga or connection with God. Hence, in her last birth she reached at the verge of Moksha. In this last stage her soul's mission was to break the fallacies of male chauvinism. Pandits, common men and women were astonished by her sharp wit and sublime truth. Her very renunciation of material world and decision to walk naked reveals that she was careless to the laws of men or society in large. She traversed in nature in her pure natural state. There was no difference between herself and nature.

"The lake became clear, and I became That."

For a lay man this is an act of revolt and madness but for her it was awakening, complete sanity and a transformation from the cocoon to a beautiful butterfly.

People find so much pain in her life but who on earth can give pain to an awakened old soul, who questions the pandit to tell her a place where there is no shiva.

"A thousand times my Guru I asked: 'How shall the Nameless be defined?' I asked and asked but all in vain.

The Nameless Unknown, it seems to me,

Is the source of the something that we see."³

Lalleshwari

She used to have conversations with the Divine then how can she be affected by the blabber of her Mother-in-law. Who deems Shiva, the divine masculine, as her husband then how can she be ever controlled by her husband by law. She peacefully and willingly discharged her duties towards them only to complete her karmas with them. One day, at the divine timing, these in laws created circumstances unknowingly for her liberation and she walked confidently into the jungle. What food she needed who has tasted the seeping elixir in her throat. What cold can shiver her body or freeze her who has balanced her surya and chandra nadi. She did not die but merged with her divine masculine. She had no worldly desires or complaints. She was a free soul, the singing bird whose divine messages of love and light

reverberates the entire kashmir valley. They are so melodious and spiritual that they still guide the common Kashmiris.

All the facts collected about her life may seem miraculous or myths to science student but if we try to understand scientifically we connote the meaning of different dimensions propounded by

Kaku, the modern scientist from Japan, who propounded the String Theory.

His string theory, which is a theory of energy or vibrations that pervades the universe. He says that everything is made of particles but that particles are not tiny dots but vibrating loops of strings. In a sense that everything is vibrating in the universe just like the strings of the universe.

"In string theory, all particles are vibrations on a tiny rubber band; physics is the harmonies on the string; chemistry is the melodies we play on vibrating strings; the universe is a symphony of strings, and the 'Mind of God' is cosmic music resonating in 11-dimensional hyperspace."⁴

Though Kaku doesn't directly connects his theory of vibrations with consciousness yet we can try to analyse consciousness in this light. The consciousness when gets aligned to the collective consciousness or how when through yoga- sadhana we raise our energy vibrations by activating our chakras and aligning them with the universal energy centres in order to work as per the desire of the universe. Tesla' obsession with the numbers 369⁵ also alludes to the same theory of energy and then our very scope of movement changes and we can travel between past, present and future. Albert Einstein' theory of gravity is the explanation of the four dimensional universe. These dimensions can be seen and comprehended by our brain but imagine what happens when we add another dimensions latitude, longitude, temperature, pressure, wind, speed etc. to it? Then naturally our dimensions make us magical i.e. visible and invisible at various places at one and the same time. Is not the Rishis and Munis were capable of doing the same thing and texts have recorded these events as magical or act of god. The saga of Tarigonda Vengamamba, Akka Mahadevi, Lalleshwari, Andal and many more did share some of the magic of the same divine energy.

" Turn within, turn within!" This was Lal's sole education:

To learn to leap inside herself, I rejected every false belief, immersed myself in my inner voice alone. Ultimately I saw myself looking deeply into my self.

And knew it to be you, God, in everyspeck."

Conclusion

Lal Ded therefore needs to be approached neither merely as a medieval rebel nor exclusively as a Shaiva, Sufi, feminist or social reformer. Each of these descriptions illuminates one aspect of her personality, yet none is sufficient to contain the magnitude of her spiritual experience. Her vākh's repeatedly return to the movement from the outer to the inner, from multiplicity to unity, from attachment to awareness and from religious formalism to direct experience. Her celebrated insistence upon turning within makes the human self itself the primary site of spiritual discovery.

"When I saw myself, I saw the universe;
when I saw the universe, I saw Him."

Her apparent rejection of social conventions, including conventional notions of female modesty and religious authority, may consequently be understood as the outward expression of an inward freedom. The awakened consciousness no longer derives its identity from the

approval or condemnation of society. In Lal Ded's poetic universe, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, attachment and renunciation become successive movements within the same field of existence. What appears to the ordinary eye as madness or rebellion may, from the perspective of mystical consciousness, signify liberation from socially constructed identities.

The language of contemporary science offers an interesting metaphorical framework for approaching this experience. Concepts such as interconnectedness, spacetime, vibration and dimensions remind us that human perception does not necessarily exhaust the possibilities of reality. Yet such concepts should not be used to

“prove” Lal Ded's mystical experiences scientifically. Their value lies rather in creating a dialogue between two different ways of asking questions about reality. Science investigates the observable structures of the universe; mysticism investigates the transforming experience of consciousness. Lal Ded belongs primarily to the latter domain.

Her vākhs finally dissolve the opposition between the worldly and the spiritual. The body becomes a field of sādhanā, speech becomes mantra, action becomes worship and the world itself becomes an expression of the Divine. This is why her poetry continues to speak across centuries and communities. She does not merely ask humanity to believe; she asks it to look within.

Perhaps this is the enduring significance of Lal Ded: the journey to the Divine is ultimately a journey into the deepest dimensions of the self. Her voice survives because the question she raised has not become obsolete: when the seeker turns completely inward and the distinction between the self and the Divine begins to disappear, what remains is not a doctrine, a sect or a social identity, but consciousness itself. Lal Ded's “rebel” voice therefore becomes, finally, the voice of awakening—a voice that continues to reverberate through Kashmir and beyond because it transforms rebellion against falsehood into union with truth.

Following B. N. Parimoo's thematic reconstruction, Lal Ded's vākhs may be read as a movement from illusion to search, realization and spiritual integration. The vākhs translated in the book (each vakh is a four-line lyrical verse, rendered in colloquial style) can also be arranged into four sections accordingly: the first, “Life of Illusions”, describes how we are mired in emotional and social attachments and material pursuits and the futility of these attachments. “A thousand times my Guru I asked: ‘How shall the Nameless be defined?’ I asked and asked but all in vain.

The Nameless Unknown, it seems to me,
Is the source of the something that we see.”
Lalleshwari

The second section, “The Search” describes the process of an individual wearing of the material life and seeking a way out by exploring different conventional paths to no avail. The third, “The Realisation” describes Lal's breakthrough moment when she experienced pure consciousness and bliss. And, finally, section four, “The Way” brings out the ultimate path leading

one's soul to meet the higher self, the realisation of “अहम ब्रह्मास्मी”

“At the end of a crazy-moon night the love of God rose.
I said, “It's me, Lalla.”

The Beloved woke. We became That, and the lake is crystal-clear." Lalleshwari

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