

Lalleshwari---Her life and Philosophy

Dr.mahjabeen akhter
Lecturer in music (vocal)

Abstract: The celebrated saint-poetess as one of the greatest symbol of Kashmir's spiritual culture. She was a great saint and a marker of Kashmiri language. Her verses reflecting a sense of values, ideals and her philosophy that form the bedrock of the civilizational ethos of Kashmir. Her appeal is universal as she talks of the oneness of all existence and shows an extraordinary awareness of the human condition in all its complexity, her Shaivate world view providing answers to so many of the fundamental existential questions that disturb the human mind. Her broad humanistic concerns and strong egalitarian tone of her verses-all these can be considered as factors that explain her pervasive hold on the Kashmiri psyche and also and her relevance in the present day world. The purpose of the paper is to describe the thrilling tales of inhuman torture that Lalla had to face the whole tale is explained. It also describes Lalla as a Shaivate devotee her everlasting spiritual philosophy is also discussed.

Keywords: Impermanence, curses, ascetic, prejudices, vakhs

Introduction:

Kashmir is known for being the abode of rishis, hermits and ascetics, whose simplicity and purity of thought, action and contempt for worldly desires has been the glittering feature of its glorious cultural heritage. Just as Kashmiri women like Yesovati, and Kota Rani, Habba Khatun and Arnimal made their mark in administrative and literary spheres, similarly Lalla Yougeshwari popularly known as Lal Ded or Mother Lal distinguished herself as the leading mystic of the fourteenth century. In Sanskrit literature she is called Lalla Yogishwari. Her simple yet philosophical teachings conveyed through the metrical indigenous language of the masses, moulded the individual as well as the collective behaviour of the

Kashmiris. Lalla was a rare genius both as a saint and as a poet. She is acknowledged by all Kashmiris, Hindus and Muslims alike.

Lalleshwari was born 1320 to 1390 during early 14th century. Jyalal Koul concludes that “Lal Ded’s date of birth may be earlier but very likely not later than 1320 A.D”. As regards her name Lal Ded has herself affirmed it in her Vakhs. She lived at Panderthan, a place about miles (seven Kilometres) to the South east of Srinagar. She was married at an early age. It is said that her mother-in-law was very cruel. She ill-treated her so much that Lalla had often to go without meals. Lalla had always a stone for her dinner. The stone was put by her mother-in-law under a thin cover of rice so as to make the heap of rice look quite big. One day, Lalla’s father-in-law discovered the truth and scolded his wife. But this incident brought greater curses on Lalla. Her mother-in-law then poisoned her son’s ears against his wife with the result that Lalla began to suffer at her husband’s hands as well. The whole tale is enshrined in one of her saying.

Hond martan kin kath

Lalli nalavath tsuli na Zanh

i.e, They may kill a big sheep or a small one

Lalla will have her Lump of stone always.

Disappointments in love and domestic life ultimately led Lalla to renounce the worldly life, she turned into an ascetic and became a wandering minstrel. She was a crusader of truth. She started moving from village to village, town to town spreading the message of true worship, non duality, piety and inward search. She was vividly conscious about the impermanence of the mundane worldly things. She expressed her grief in these words.

Aami panedh sadras naw ches laman

Kati bozi daya myon metidiyi tar.

Aamyen taakyen pany chum srravaan

Zuv chum brimaun gachuha gaar.

i.e, I am pulling my boat with yarn,

will God listen to my prayers and will ferry me across.

These worldly attachments which duly came into
conceivable senses

My conscious soul is eager to set for my real home.

Lalla met Sedh Bayu Srikanth the Shaivate Saint and became his spiritual disciple. He initiated her into the Shaivate sect. Her thoughts to practice Yoga, compose and recite verses in praise of Lord Shiva, her God. The subject of these verses is spirituality and mysticism, free from caste, creed, colour, prejudices, greed and narrow mindedness.

Her Vakhas endeavouring to awaken man from self-indulgence have carved out for them a prominent position in the Kashmiri culture, language and literature, ever since they fell from her lips.

Lalla's Vakh or Vakyani-from Sanskrit meaning a sentence i.e, Vakh is her own term shows her to have been a strong Hindu sectraian. It shows her as a Shiva of the Kashmiri variety, well acquainted with the terms of the philosophy of the Shivas and with the Yoga doctrine of the same division of the Hindus. She came to be respected equally by Hindus and Muslims of valley.

The great Lalla of Kashmir was no exception. She has described the way she nurtured love for her beloved God in a number of her Vakhs, in a variety of expressions. She has compared love with ever burning fire.

Loluk naar lali lalanovum

i.e, I cradle the fire of love in my bosom.

In course of time she had become one with God and an embodiment of love. Many great sages and sufis, who followed her have prayed to God to grant them the same exalted position as she had attained. A few of her Vakhs will illustrate her philosophy and the message she seeks to convey. She holds the sacred syllable 'Om' supreme.

Akui omkar yes nabi dare,

Kumbai brahmandas sum gare.

Akh sui manthar tsyatas kare,

Tas sas manthar kyah kare.

i.e, He who meditates on the single syllable Om
and connects the lower most aspect of his self with the upper most
aspect,
remembering all the time this one sacred syllable,
for him all other syllables are meaningless.

Shiv chuy thali thali rozan,

Mozan Hinu to Musalman.

Truk ay chuk ta pan panum parzanav,

Saychay sahibas sati asniy zan.

i.e, Shiv pervades every place,
don't differentiate between Hindu and Musalman.

If you are intelligent, recognize yourself,
That is the true acquaintance with God.

It is clear that Lalleshwari was a practitioner of Shiva philosophy, who believed in ultimate merger of the seeker and divine through Yoga.

Knowles, in his dictionary of Kashmiri proverbs, has collected some 1600. None of these proverbs have greater reputation than the Lalla Vakyanis, so much so that her sayings have remained in the beginning of every Raga or Muqam of the local classical music called 'Sufiana Kalam'. Besides the singing of Vakhs on appropriate occasions-festive events such as marriage ceremonies and at cultural functions. In this way her work is of general importance.

Lal Ded has not written what she said, nor we possess any manuscript containing her sayings either attested by her or compiled by any of her contemporaries. Her Vakhs have descended, as we know them today, orally. In fact, it was during the beginning of the twentieth century that her sayings saw the light of the day. Lal Vakhs passed on from grand parents to grand children through generations without recourse to the written word. Such "fleshy tables of the heart are often more trustworthy than birch-bark of paper manuscript"

According to a renowned oriental scholar like Sir George Grierson. He was also able to record the text of Lalla-Vakyanis from the dictation of an old Brahman named Dharma-dasa Darwesh of the village of Gush in Tehsil Handwara. The Brahman had received the Lalla's songs by family tradition and recited them verbatim, literatim, et punctatim to Grierson accordingly. The object of this version of Lalla's saying is to place the Shiva form of Hinduism. Thus due to the noble work done by such European scholars the precious sayings of Lal Ded were collected and recorded. George A. Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett worked together and edited "Lalla-Vakhyani" in 1920 A.D, rendering these sayings into English verse and also describing her religion. Pt. Anand Koul Bamzai, a noted Kashmiri antiquarian came up with his "Lalla Yogeshwari her life and sayings" with

additional 75 sayings not recorded by Grierson. “LalDed” written by a researcher like Jaya Lal Koul, is another significant contribution on the subject.

Lalla’s Vakhs convey a message of peace and harmony and one can see that she owes it as much to her educational background in a shaivate Kashmiri Brahman family as to her spiritual enlightenment based on her own sadhana. There is a definite impress of the Shaivate thought and terminology on her Vakhs. Whatever her background, there is also evidence in the Vakhs of a state of awareness and of an outlook for transcending cults.

The life of Lalla like many other saints is shrouded in myth, miracle and legend. A tale depicting the miraculous power of Lal Ded is worth to be recorded here. It is said that soon after her meditations at the shrine at Zinpora ghat near Pampore, she was returning to her home with an earthen pot full of water. Her husband was hiding there to find where Lalla used to go early in the morning. He in his rage stuck the pot with a stick. The pot broke into pieces, but the water was not split and Lalla filled all pots in her house with this water and then threw down the remainder of the water outside the house. It was here that a pond sprang up. This pond is still known as Lal Tang and the inhabitants of Pampore whether Hindus or Muslims pay their respects at this place even today. The pond is said to have been filled with water upto 1925 A.D.

There is one more saying has its original in a story well known in Kashmir is:

Aye wonis gaye kadrīs

i.e., She came to the baniya’s but arrived at the baker’s

Shah Hamdan was a famous saint, who exercised a great influence in the conversion of the country to Islam. He arrived in 1378-80. Lalla is said to have been influenced by him. This saying has its original in a story well known in Kashmir. Lal Ded, whose name has been mentioned before, used to peregrinate in an almost nude condition, and was constantly saying that ‘He only was aman, who feared God, and there were very few such man about’.

Oneday Shah Hamdan, after whom the famous mosque in Srinagar is called, met her, and she at once ran away. There was a strange thing for Lal Ded to do; but it was soon explained. 'I have seen a man,' she said, to the astonished baniya, into whose shop she had fled for refuge. The baniya, however, turned her out. Then Lal Ded rushed to the baker's house and jumped into the oven, which at that time was fully heated for baking the bread. When the baker saw this he fell down in a swoon, thinking that, for certain, the king would hear of this and punish him. However, there was no need to fear, as Lal Ded presently appeared from the mouth of the oven clad in clothes of gold, and hastened after Shah Hamdan.

One of the widely accepted story about her is that she visited the household of Noor-ud-Din or Nunda Rishi her junior contemporary, when he was born. His mother complained that he would not take milk from her breast Lal Ded took the body in her arm and addressed him thus;

Yina manda chhok na chana kyazi chhukh mandachhan

i.e, if you did not feel shy of being born, why feel shy of sucking.

It is said that immediately thereafter he started sucking his mother's breast. In Kashmiri poetry Sheikh Noor-ud-Din holds a very important position. His early poetry was strongly influenced by Lal Ded. In his verses there is a deep sense of mystic thought and philosophy. Love and intense devotion to God forms the basis of his poetry.

Prof. JayaLal, quoting the remark in his book titled "Lal Ded", makes his observation on it in these words: "As every Kashmiri, Hindu or Muslim, sees it, the truth is the other way round. Besides, Lal Ded should have been sixty, if not more, when Nund Rishi was born."

Conclusion:

Lal Ded have permeated the life of Kashmiris and her sayings have become current coins of quotation being used even in daily conversation. These are the

fine productions of spiritual maturity and divine inspiration. She is acclaimed equally by Hindus and Muslims as their revered “mother, heroine and preceptress.” In fact her ideals taught in a simple but impressive tone have been torchbearer in guiding and shaping the practical life of Kashmiris while she shows us the path to attain heavenly bliss through inner quest for truth and by being free from desires, she in the meantime has laid the foundations of modern “secularism” by delivering the message of tolerance, peace, mutual harmony and racial discriminations.

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