

**LalVakhs: A Study of Mystic Experience in the Selected Poems of LalDed**

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**Abstract**

The present paper attempts to highlight the Mystic experience of the Kashmiri Poetess-Saint LalDed. She wrote verses or Vakhs in Kashmiri language expressing her longing for the Devine (God). The period she lived was a period of great religious upheaval and change. Her poems formed an important part of Kashmiri language and culture and are still very much revered today. This paper aims to highlight her longing for Shiva, the ultimate being and her profound self- realization. Her Vakhs which are poetic compositions of four or sometimes more than four lines, are full of Mystic excellence with a spiritual depth and clarity. Her vakhs speak her communion with the absolute truth (God), which she did by leading a simple life, free from worldly desires and greed. Her Vakhs implore us to listen the inner voice, as she herself believes that the realization of self is similar with the realization of Shiva, the ultimate or Devine personality. Her Mystic and spiritual poetry is a glorious heritage of Kashmiri literature.

**Keywords-** *Mysticism, spirituality, Devine, God, and Self*

Lalded or Laleshwari was a Kashmiri Mystic poet and saint. She was a creator of the Mystic poetry called Vatsun. Her verses were known as Vakhs in Kashmiri and speech in English language. She is known throughout the world by various names including; Lalded, Mother Lalla, LallaArifa, LalDidi, Laleshwari, LallaYogishwari and Lalishri. Born in Pandrethan in a Kashmiri Pandit family at the time of Sultan- Ala- Ud- Din, her parents married her at a young age in a

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Brahmin family at Pampore when she was twelve years old only. Her Mother- in- law treated her badly, she was cruel and never give her any peace. She used to put a stone on her plate and then covers the stone with rice so that people would get the impression that lal ded has a plate full of rice. But she never complains about her Mother - in – law. Lalla walked naked in most of her life when she was young. It was a saint and Mystic NundRishi that lalla saw and transforms into spirituality. When Lalla saw him at the first time she was terrified and she exclaimed; here is a man and I should cover myself. She ran into the bakers shop and jumped into a blazing oven. It was a saint NundRishi who came and asked her to come out. Lalla came out of the oven with a beautiful, coloured shawl on her shoulders. It was NundRishi under whose guidance Lalla attained peace.

Lal ded said verses in the Kashmiri language on subjects of Mysticism and spiritualism reaching the common people with the message that colour, caste, prejudice, narrow- mindedness are worthless. She gave people of Kashmir the message of equality and served them irrespective of caste and greed. It was under the influence of NundRishi, a renowned Kashmiri saint that Lal Ded embraced Islam. Lalla stands not only among Mystic poets, but among women and other enslaved beings. The total absence of the gender factor or her own wishes of femininity is a striking feature of her art. Mysticism is quite evident in her poetry, the main focus being on the realization of the absolute self. This Mystic explorance is the part of Kashmiri folklore. In the present times a new word Kashmiriyat has been coined to describe and highlight the distinct features of Kashmiri Mysticism and outlook. The form of Lallas poetry is known as Vakh- a four line quatrain, thematically complete and independent in itself and Mystical and didactic in context in Kashmiri literature.

Her Vakhs are full of Mystic excellence with a spiritual depth and clarity. It was Richard Temple and JaylalKaul who translated her Vakhs into English. The following Mystic lines bear the testimony of her spiritual experiences;

I, Lalla entered through the garden of my soul  
Lo, I saw Shiva and Shakti rolled in one, overwhelmed with joy,  
I got immersed there in that lake of bliss.  
Now I live like dead in complete surrender of my being to him.  
(Vakh no 68, P72 *Lal and Her Vakh*).

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Her Vakhs are full of Kashmiri proverbs in which she speak of her inner quest, inward control, self surrender, self purification and a sincere pursuit of spiritual perfection. Examples of some Kashmiri proverbs and their translation is as;

HondMaarytankinukath

LaliNiluvathtsali nu zanh.

The English translation of this proverb is that whether they kill a sheep or a ram, it is all the same for Lalleshwari. She has always a stone in her plate of food. Her another important proverb is as; 'Seki shathasbyolvavun' (it means to sow seeds in a desert is a wasteful effort). LalDed did not compose her Vakhs as a deliberate contribution to literature or philosophy, she did not sing them nor write them. Her verses are an expression of her comment on what she observed around her. As a saint she said in one of her Vakhs that there is one God and one should not distinguish between a Muslim and a Hindu. The message conveyed is to know the inner truth of one's self. LalDed was born with a poetic soul and her experience found expression in such a poetic language as has an inspiration. Her Vakhs represent the dawn of the modern Kashmiri language. Her sayings are full of Mysticism and are deep and sublime. Due to her communicative skills, her Vakhs are considered as a literary treasure both for the common reader and the critic. As a seer, she criticized the materialistic world around her in one of her Vakhs as;

I weep and weep for you, o mind (My soul);

The world hath caught you in its spell.

Though you cling to them with the anchor of steel.

Not even the shadow of things you love will go with you when you are dead.

Why then have you forgot your own true self.

(Vakh no 212, P 208 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

In the above lines she said that the worldly things detach you from the path of truth. These things make a man corrupt and will never go with him after death. In the last line of the above mentioned verse she says why human beings have forgotten the true self. This vakh shows her longing for the true self. Lalla entered the world of spirituality and what did she see? Shiva, the transcendental being united with his power of manifestation, Shakti. She was now totally free from doubts based on the sense of duality. She had her faith in one God and was the worshipper of Lord Shiva. In one of her poems she longs for the sacrifices that she could make to God;

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Thou art the earth, thou art the sky,  
Thou art the air, the day and the night;  
...Thou art the water, thou art the flowers,  
Thou art all these and everything.  
What may I in worship bring to thee.  
(Vakh no 40, P 116 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

In these lines she made it clear that Shiva is present in everything; in flowers, air, water, sky, sun and moon. Then what special can one do in order to worship God (Shiva). It is not that she is talking in paradoxes about cycle of birth and rebirth and immortality of the soul. She is talking of human life which is a stream that flows onwards and onwards. It is this experience of reality that is at the core of her Mysticism, and this is what marks her as a great poet. LalDed is not a professional philosopher, nor her verses are a philosophical treatise, but she is deeply concerned with the predicament and ultimate destiny of humankind. Her choice of Vakhs as the medium for her poetic outpouring was indeed most appropriate. The crisp, aphoristic, cryptic four line verse form was quite suitable for the rhythm of thought that marked her poetic expression and was also easy for the common man to adopt to his ear and to memorize. Lallas Mystic journey to realization was by no means an easy one. She tells us of her experience in quite few of her verses;

On nothing else I built my hopes,  
In nothing else I put my trust,  
My Vakh brought me the wine I drank,  
My Vakh gave me the strength to seize...  
(Vakh no 184, P 208 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

Her journey, she realizes, has been actually a journey of self discovery in which it is Shiva who sets out in search of Shiva for Shiva is all. What gave her poetry its distinctive flavor, was the vitality of her idiom, the use of imagery taken from everyday life. What her Vakhs really did was to provide them with a spiritual vision and moral strength with which they could arm their souls to meet the tremendous challenge that the times imposed for them. She was not only a poet – saint of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but a symbol of the continuity of five thousand years of Kashmir's civilizational ethos. Her Vakhs are full of her Mystic and spiritual journey and we can

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discover or identify in them the destinations she arrived at. Her Vakhs have come to us through oral transmission, and not in the language in which they originally were. Her verses are an intimate record of her sufferings and struggles, her aspirations and achievements. Many of her Vakhs depict her restlessness to establish a personal relationship with Shiva. The most memorable of her verses are those that reveal her hearts wounds from under the saffron robes of detachment.

I lalla went forth in the hope of blooming like a cotton flower.  
Many a blow did the ginner and the carder give to me.  
And the spinning woman spun me into a fine yarn...  
Then did I, Lalla, obtain the way of the supreme.  
(Vakh no 93, P 157 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

In these lines Lalla uses the analogy of the process of manufacturing a garment from a cotton pod to illustrate the suffering she has endured at various stages of her spiritual development. Lalla while rejecting a socially protected life, finds herself exposed to every kind of anxiety, including that of the staving of hunger, as seen in the following verses;

O restless mind, do not be afraid  
The eternal one is taking care of you.  
You may not know it, but he will satiate your hunger.  
To him alone you must cry for help.  
(Vakh no 30, P 90 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

In order to express the personal Mystical awareness of the supreme reality, LalDed has taken the route of devotion, laying bare the wounds of her soul to Shiva. Her emotional relationship with Shiva, shows her genius both as a saint and as a poet. She can be regarded as the foremost representative of the Shiva Bhakti poetry of Kashmir. In her verses she shared a sharp feeling of the ultimate presence of Shiva, the ultimate being, and a powerful laying for him. She yearns for Shiva intensely in order to attain Mystic communion with him. Lalla, experienced the bliss of Shiva on her when she entered into the garden of her own heart. It is there that she quenches her thirst and hunger. As the following verse suggests;

Through the door to the garden of my mind  
I, Lalla, entered and lo what bliss?

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I saw Shiva in communion with Shakti...

For I shall be dead even though alive.

(Vakh no 40, P 114 *Lal and Her Vakhs*).

In these lines it can be highlighted that a person comes only in contact with the supreme with he knows his inner self. The path of hell and heaven are inside us and it is up to we people which path we choose. Lalla in her Vakhs made it clear that she detached herself from the worldly pleasures and resides in contact with the supreme, the ultimate God. She chooses spirituality in order to come in close contact with God.

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