

Mystical Resistance in Lalla Ded's Poetry

Anayat Ali Shah

Ph.D. Scholar,
Department of English,
Manuu, Hyderabad, India

Abstract

In the present contemporary world, there has been a rapid propagation of scholarship on resistance literature. Since, resistance is one of the peculiar aspects in the lives of mystics as they raise their voices against the elite and clerical hegemonic structures in their respective times. The aim of this paper is to explore the resistance elements in the poetry of Lall Ded, 14th century mystic poetess of Kashmir. In some of the poems, Lall Ded protests against the then two major institutions: Elite and the Temple. Accordingly, she becomes the voice of the marginalized and the exploited that are impoverished and made the 'Other' by the then elite and the Temple. Further the paper also attempts to analyse why she had not been mentioned in the early historical documents.

Keywords: Resistance, clerics, Kashmir, *Vakhs*, hegemony, elite, legend.

Introduction

Lalla Ded (1320-1392) was a female poetess and saint of the 14th century Kashmir. She utters poetry, commonly known as *Vakhs* (Oral sayings) at that time when Geoffrey Chaucer was writing in England. Her poetry mostly in quatrains forms the foundation not only of Kashmiri literature but also of Kashmiri language and culture as a whole. Ranjit Hoskote who has translated the verses of Lalla into English writes, "Lalla's poems are among the earliest known manifestations of Kashmiri literature, and record the moment when Kashmiri began to emerge, as a modern language" (Hoskote 2013: x). She is believed to be the greatest saint poetess of Kashmir has ever produced. Jayalal Kaul in his book *Lalla Ded writes* that, "Lalla Ded is undoubtedly one of the greatest spiritual geniuses of world" (Kaul 1973, p.88). Nund Rishi, her immediate successor, a great scholar, Sufi saint, and a founder of Muslim Reshi Order in the Valley praised her like this:

(Tas padmaan pooryichyi Laley

Tamyi galey galey amryath chyovov

Swa seeny avatar lwaley

Tyith mya var dyitoo dyivovo) (Qouted InTemple)

*Lalla, who was born at Padmanpur,
Quaffed elixir to her satiation;
She was a women-siant with God in her bosom,
O God bless me too as You did her.. (Temple 2005: II)*

However, she is entwining in clump of stories and legends; with a result, her personality has become misty. There are scholars who declared that they brushed away the cobwebs, but it hardly sounds true. Lalla, the great mystic is today wrapped up in the mysteries and this in fact is the achievement of her poetry and the connotation of her gigantic personality. According to the German philosopher, Goethe, the ultimate of human dignity ends up its authenticity on a legend or myth. Accordingly, people who reached the peak of their fame and magnificence are typically found in legends than reality, and the same happens to Lalla Ded.

Raj Tarangini, historical chronicle of Kashmir, written in Sanskrit by Kalhana (Kashmiri Brahman) records the events up to 1149-50 A.D. Another historian, Jon Raj added the events up to 1457 A.D. to the book. However, unfortunately Lalla Ded has not been mentioned anywhere in this important historical document. Historians like Shri Dhar and others too have not pointed out Lalla Ded anywhere. It is worth to mention here, that she was a rebel and stood against the then oppressed structures constructed by the elite of the times and that cloud have been one of the reasons of her displacement in their texts. As she writes:

*(Dev wata diwor wata
Petha bona chuy yeka watha
Puzai kas karakh, hota Bata!
Kar manas ta pawnas sangath) (quoted in Grierson.)*

*God is stone, the temple is stone,
Head to foot, all stone.
Hey priest-man, what's the object of your worship?
Get your act together, join mind with life-breath.*

(Quoted in Hoskote. 60)

From the above quatrain, one could easily find that how strongly she dismissed the custom of idol worship and according to her, the idol and temple both are made of same stone and in a sarcastic tone she asked to the priest, whom are you worshipping? And, suggested him that the right action lies in the contemplation of self. According to her these rituals are devoid of spiritual aspects and only ignorant could be indulge in these insane customs.

In another quatrain she addresses the Temple priest in an annoyed tone about the sacrifice of an animal to the idol. According to Lalla, it is an ignorant act to sacrifice the living thing to a non-living. She says:

*(Laz Kassi Shiet nivarai
Trana zala Karaan aahaar,
Ye kami vopdesh koruy hatu Batta,
Atsitan Vattas Satsithan dyun aahaar)* (quoted in khal)

*It covers your shame, keep you from shivering.
Grass and water are all the food it asks.
Who taught you, priest-man,
to feed this breathing thing to your thing of stone?*

(Quoted in Hoskote. 61)

Lalla, being well versed in Hindu scriptures and was aware that animal sacrifice is prohibited there. Due to some intrusion of wrong notions spread by the then priests for their own welfare and with the result sacrifice of an animal especially goat or lamb became a part of Hindu tradition and is known as Bali, a tribute to the god or goddess. It is mostly associated with *Shakti* worship. In the above poem she asks the priest that it is the wool of the lamb that covers your shame and it only asks for grass and water that too is not yours. She further says in a sarcastic tone, who taught you stubborn priest to sacrifice the living to your own created idol? It was not easy to raise a voice against the then patriarchal dominance like, elite and priests. Priests were regarded as next to God and were having high status in the society. Lalla was bold enough to stage a protest against these priest-made customs inserted in the Hindu tradition and her powerful weapon was her poetry that she utters publically. Lalla challenged the authority of the religious structures and social orders of the times and being a true mystic, she laid emphasis on the self exploration that ultimately leads to the Truth. Moreover, she chooses common mans language to reach the masses and rejected the elite language though she herself was well versed in Sanskrit that was the elite language of the era. Her aim was to make the masses aware about the exploitation of the then elite and temple priests who acted as semi-Gods. The custodians of temple found her a threat to their age old hegemony. In this regard, Zafar rightly observes:

To neutralize the impact of this rebellion declared her to be mad and insane and it is because of these circumstances that we don't find her mention in any of the historical accounts written in Sanskrit during and after her times.

(Journal of Kashmir Studies 80)

Baba Dawood Khaki (Ar) was the only one who referred to Lalla first time in his book entitled *Asar-ul- Abrar*. The book mentioned that it was during the reign of Sultan

Shuhab-u-Din (1344-55), Lalla ded break off her home and start roaming from village to village. Her *Vakhs* (oral sayings) was not pen down during her life time. In this regard Temple writes:

The profound verses of Lal dayad were recorded from oral tradition for the first time by Baba Da'ud mashkwati in his book *asraral abraar* in 1654; the manuscript was in the Persio-Arabic script.

(Temple 2005: II)

All the scholars agree that she was contemporary of Sayyed Ali Hamadani, the famous Sufi saint, who came Kashmir in 1380 for proselytisation of Islam. In this connection Grierson and Barnett writes in their book *Lalla Vakyani*, "She probably lived in the 14th century of our era, being a contemporary of Sayyed Ali Hamadani at the time of his visit to Kashmir" (3).

Conclusion

Lall Ded, being critical of the then dominant structure of the valley was not taken seriously by the historians of her times. Further, the lack of extensive research on her life, has swathed her in legend and myths. To reconstruct her figure in the light of authentic information and looking at her as a poet and a rebel mystic who gave voice to common men, women, heart-stricken etc becomes mandatory before proceeding into any kind of intellectual or literary discourse. And then, putting her in modern settings will also not only amend her position as a connection between past and present but will lay her message in a diverse framework. The resistance aspect of her poetry needs more deep delving that will help us to understand how these mystics like Lall Ded acts as resistance icons and saviours of social fabric like harmony, love and respect.

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