

# **Siddha Yogini, Lalla Aarifah**

## **A Kashmiri Secret of Divine Knowledge**

By Laila Khalid Ghauri  
B.A. in Religion, B.S. in Biology, May 2008, The George Washington University

A thesis submitted to  
The Faculty of  
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences  
of the George Washington University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

January 31, 2012

Thesis directed by:

Mohammad Faghfoory  
Professorial Lecturer of Religion

Kelly Pemberton  
Assistant Professor of Religion

## Abstract of Thesis

### **Siddha Yogini, Lalla Aarifah** A Kashmiri Secret of Divine Knowledge

Lalla Yogeshwari, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri poetess, changed Kashmir spiritually, intellectually, and socially. Very little work has been produced in Western academia regarding her life and work. The modern canon of her poetry is referred to as her “sayings” or *vaakhs* in Kashmiri, which are credited for having formed the basis of the Kashmiri language. Many have written of her work as belonging exclusively to either Hindu Shaivism or Sufism. Her experience and development occurred within various religious traditions of Kashmir during her time, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam.

Lalla’s religious identity has been hotly debated in the last century. This research is an attempt to settle the debate, and to explore the time, life, and work of Lalla. I have attempted to untangle the arguments about her religious beliefs through examination of her life within the greater historical, religious, and socio-cultural framework of Kashmiri society. It is crucial to understand Lalla’s interaction with Kashmiri Shaivism and Muslim Sufism. All these subjects will be explored through hagiographies provided by her contemporaries and by recent scholars. Most important of all, Lalla must be studied through her own *vaakhs*. My research will largely rely on the translation of Lalla’s *vaakhs* done by Nil Kanth Kotru. In her sayings she grapples with the idea of duality and the desire for union with God—her poetry embodies the language of Hindu Shaivism and Persian Sufism suggesting the possibility of peaceful coexistence in Kashmir through common religious phenomena

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract of Thesis</b> .....	ii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 2: Shaivism</b>	
Kashmir and Shaivism .....	8
Atman, Shakti, and Tattavas .....	17
Shaivite Mysticism .....	23
<b>Chapter 3: Islam</b>	
The Coming of Islam to India .....	32
Islam and Lalla .....	39
Lalla and Sufism .....	46
<b>Chapter 4: History and Work</b>	
The Life of Lalla .....	58
The Vaakhs .....	67
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b> .....	72
<b>References</b> .....	76

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the cycle of creation and dissolution of the world, there stands a 14<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri poetess that changed Kashmir spiritually, intellectually, and socially. This woman is Lalla Yogeshwari, an eminent female saint, about whom very little work has been produced in Western academia. The modern canon of her poetry is referred to as her “sayings” or *vaakhs* as they are known in Kashmir. This literature is credited for providing the basis of the Kashmiri language. Many have written of her work as belonging exclusively to either Hindu Shaivism or Sufism. While Lalla’s search began in the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition, she was exposed to many views about religion, spirituality, and God throughout her life, which affected and transformed her ideas. Her experience and development occurred within various religious traditions of Kashmir during her time, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam. Sir Richard Carnac Temple, a British anthropologist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggests that she had exposure to Christian thought because certain ideas of monotheism and the day of resurrection are prevalent in the literature that is attributed to her. However this is highly unlikely, as Christianity had not made major contact with Kashmir during her lifetime. This is at best a testament to her interaction with Islam, which brought with it messages of other Semitic traditions.

Lalla’s religious identity has been hotly debated in the last century. Numerous Kashmiri Hindu scholars argue that she was a Shaivite, while the others argue for her conversion to Islam towards the end of her life. This

research is an attempt to settle the debate, and to explore the time, life, and work of Lalla. I have attempted to untangle the arguments about her religious beliefs through examination of Lalla's life within the greater historical, religious, and socio-cultural framework of Kashmiri society. I intend to thoroughly explore the history and teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism, Persian Sufism, and how each tradition influenced Lalla. It is crucial to understand Lalla's interaction with Muslim Sufism and explore the possibility of Lalla's conversion to Islam. All these subjects will be explored through hagiographies provided by her contemporaries and by recent scholars. Most important of all, Lalla must be studied through her own *vaakhs*, for nothing else describes her ideas and philosophy as her own work. Numerous scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century have translated her poetry to English. My research will largely rely on the translation done by Nil Kanth Kotru in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, although a great deal of it is cross referenced with earlier translations done by Jai Lal Kaul<sup>1</sup> and Richard Carnac Temple, and a later translation by Coleman Barks<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to note that Lalla did not produce a novel religion through the combination of Shaivite and Sufi principles. The nature of her realizations can be classified as monotheistic in the post-modern understanding of religion. She exhibits this through vocabulary and philosophy from both Shaivism and Persian Sufism. So is Lalla a Muslim or Hindu? The question cannot be easily answered. Her *vaakhs* attest that she reached the realm of forms, beyond identity and the

---

<sup>1</sup> He is an Indian scholar of religion, who did extensive research on the life and sayings of Lalla in the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> He is an American poet, who is renowned as an interpreter of Rumi and various other mystics poets, including Lalla in his book *Naked Song* in 1992.

ego. The need to associate with one religion over another contradicts the basic message of her *vaakhs*. Lalla is not interested in religious identity, ritual, or even sacred text. If there are arguments that say otherwise, they disregard her sayings altogether. Lalla yearns only for union with God, and has little regard for dogma and religious rituals.

Mohammad Ishaq Khan, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri historian of Islam and Kashmir, describes Kashmir as enveloped on all sides like a jewel hidden in snowy mountains, where the valley in the south leads to the gate of the kingdom. The mystical land has a rich ancient history, and it has been inhabited for more than 5,000 years.<sup>3</sup> People have been drawn to the mystery of the remarkable, breath-taking region of Kashmir. Outside its current political turmoil and devastation, its religious and intellectual histories have been largely overlooked. While Kashmir has attracted many people for its beauty and wonders throughout time, it has also produced some of the greatest Saints and philosophers in Hinduism and Islam during the later middle ages. Perhaps it is the natural beauty of this land that inspires the sacred within humans, causing the light of the Ultimate Self to shine. Lalla is one of the most pivotal personalities and renowned saints of Islam and Hinduism in the region, and above all she is the only female sage of Kashmir.

It is perhaps more important to note that Lalla is known by her maiden name, which may have been short for Lalita<sup>4</sup>. Lalla is a common female name in

---

<sup>3</sup> Khan, Mohammad Ishaq. *Kashmir's transition to Islam: the role of Muslim rishis (15th-18th Century)*. 4th ed. Kashmir: Gulshan Books, 2005, v.

<sup>4</sup> Kotru, Nil Kanth. *Lal Ded: Her Life & Sayings*. Delhi: Utpal Publications, 1989, vii.

Kashmir, and it translates roughly to “darling”.<sup>5</sup> Women during that time were given a new name after marriage, which they carried as a mark of their matrimony. In this way when Lalla married, she received the new name of Padmavati.<sup>6</sup> However, she continued to refer to herself by her maiden name, Lalla, a serious break from convention.

Over time she acquired many names, most of which reflected her significance among her contemporaries. These names show both the high reverences she received for her wisdom and the high spiritual station she attained. In Sanskrit, she is called Lalla “Yogeshwari”, which is a title reserved for the most pious of women; it is for those who excel in their knowledge of Yogic asceticism. Nil Kanth Kotru, a late 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian scholar who specialized in researching Lalla’s life, often refers to her as Siddha Yogini, a highly revered title in Sanskrit, which translates to “one who is accomplished in overcoming the senses”. Her nickname Lalli denotes “radiance” in Sanskrit. For the Kashmiri Muslim population she is known as Lalla Arifah, or “Lalla the knower of Divine knowledge”, a name reserved for the most revered mystics.<sup>7</sup> Her name Laleshwari can be interpreted as “Lalla of strength” or “Lalla the strong” in Sanskrit.<sup>8</sup> A 20<sup>th</sup> century renowned Indian Hindu Scholar of Kashmir, S. S. Toshkhani writes about Lalla as Lalla Ded, or “Lalla the wise grandmother”.

---

<sup>5</sup> Temple, Richard Carnac. *The word of Lalla the prophetess; being the sayings of Lal Ded or Lal Diddi of Kashmir (Granny Lal) known also as Laleshwari, Lalla Yogishwari & Lalishri, between 1300 & 1400 A.D. Done into English verse from the Lalla-vakyani or Lal-wakhi and annotated* . Cambridge Eng.: The University Press, 1924, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, Michelle Voss. *May Your Heart Dissolve: Duality and Relation in Mehtchild of Magdeburg and Lalla of Kashmir*. Atlanta: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Emory University, 2006, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

These titles bear witness to the high spiritual station of asceticism that she attained. The designations demonstrate the spiritual prominence she was given among very different religious communities thereby exhibiting her virtue, strength, and wisdom. According to R. C. Temple, she was known by numerous other names.

Michelle Voss Roberts, a current Professor of Theology and Culture at Wake Forest University, who concentrated extensively on the study of Lalla, demonstrates in her literature that Lalla was liberated from the conventional life of her time. As a woman of Brahmin decent, Lalla broke many traditions. One of the most pivotal was that of familial obligations of a woman during her time. She left her husband's house at a very young age. She concluded that the *karma*<sup>9</sup> of her human relationships had come to an end. Consequently, she set out to search for her real home in the court of God.

Initially, she studied with gurus from the Kashmiri Shaivism lineage, who taught her Shaivite philosophy and yogic practice. She reportedly reached the supreme state of *avadhut*, in which she transcended body-consciousness in Shaivism. However, it is the later part of her life that is under great debate. Various contemporary scholars of India avoid highlighting Lalla's interaction with Islam altogether. There is great debate between the possibilities of conversion to Islam, but her *vaakhs* neither confirm nor deny this.

Persian hagiographers produced all written record of Lalla's life, and usually linked her to Muslim Sufis Saints like Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Nooruddin

---

<sup>9</sup> In this instance the word *karma* should be understood as "duty" or "obligation" of human roles, although *karma* can also be understood as "action", "deed", or that which perpetuates *samsara* or the cycle of cause and effect.



Noorani. Sometimes these stories speak about a point in her life, where she converted to Islam. As Brahmin chroniclers of her time did not document anything about her life, it is difficult to confirm or reject the available documentation. However, this evidence emphasizes that Lalla had close contact to both religious traditions, which found their way into the heart of her *vaakhs*.

According to a much-contested legend, after Lalla left ordinary living, she roamed the streets naked, reciting her sayings, and preaching the nature of God. The question of Lalla's nudity will be explored further in a later section of this paper. It was around this time Lalla's *vaakhs* first became recognized in most Kashmiri households. Her sayings found a place in the hearts of all Kashmiri people. The *vakh-yani* provided one of the cornerstones of the Kashmiri language, as it is known today.

As in any Sufi literature, Lalla's verses speak of the intense yearning for God, but the vocabulary is not limited to Islam. Her poetry is filled with images and words from Shaivism. It encourages one to step outside the limitations of the language, intellect, and the logical reasoning mind. Her work serves as a good example of syncretic literature of various religions, placing her among many religions at one time. The argument is not whether Lalla was Hindu or Muslim, but rather that it could be possible she identified with neither actively but followed both. The monotheism of Kashmiri Shaivism is not entirely different from the Persian Sufism of Hamadani. Lalla's works display that it is possible for the encounter of Islam to find peaceful coexistence, as her *vaakhs* propose. Perhaps

it is also this very work that may provide a way for peace for Hinduism and Islam in Kashmir today.

This multi-faceted personality demands extensive original research. The fact that two visibly different communities can both claim her as their own testifies to the universality of her sayings. A discussion of this saint may make it possible to provide religious equivalence, or at least comparative discussion, between Kashmiri Shaivism and Sufism. In the past her works provided the Kashmiri people with their language and basis for religion. It is hoped that reintroducing her to readers in Kashmir and in the West may provide a venue for communication, understanding, and dialogue among the religious communities.

## Chapter 2

### Shaivism

#### *Kashmir and Shaivism*

Between the eight and twelfth centuries of the Common Era, the territory of northern India known as Kashmir was transforming. This was a time when various philosophical and religious schools of thought were engaged in active hermeneutic exchange.<sup>10</sup> During this time, the genesis of Kashmiri Shaivism took place. This group qualifies as both a religious tradition and a philosophical school. These individuals were asking questions about existence, the origin of life, morals, ethics, and other philosophical inquiries. This sophisticated, multi-faceted tradition exhibits a strong metaphysical doctrine.

According to N. K. Kotru, Lalla was a devout Shaivite, and she met her first spiritual guide, Siddha Sri Kanth at an early age.<sup>11</sup> N. K. Kotru also argues that this guru is now recognized as the founder of Kashmiri Shaivism as it is understood today. Such arguments purport that Lalla was one of the front-runners of Kashmiri Shaivism. However, individuality does not seem to be of importance in Lalla's work, therefore she never specifies her religious status. To reduce her *vaakhs* to any single religious tradition is a great reduction of her sayings. Nonetheless, her work is heavily embedded with religious Sanskrit terminology and Shaivite philosophy. To comprehend her verses and teachings it

---

<sup>10</sup> Chatterji, Jagadish Chandra. *Kashmir Shaivism*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986, vii.

<sup>11</sup> Kotru, xi.

is essential to understand the doctrine of Shaivism, especially that of the Samkhya and Yoga systems of thought.

Extensive research in M. V. Robert's book *May Your Heart Dissolve*, insinuates that there was no single way of practicing Kashmiri Shaivism during Lalla's time.<sup>12</sup> Several different, though mutually influential, textual and ritual schools were in operation, including the *Spanda*, *Krama*, *Trika*, and *Kaula*. According to R. C. Temple, it is not to be assumed that Lalla was acquainted with the whole of *Samkhya* or *Yoga* theory or that she necessarily understood any other school in entirety, however the content of her *Lalla Vakh-yani* suggests that she learned a great deal of *Trika* philosophy with her gurus.<sup>13</sup> Jagadish Chandara Chatterji, a mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian school of Kashmiri Shaivism, contends that *Trika* philosophy on the whole amounts to understanding Shiva as both the ultimate principle and the process of experiencing *Para Samvid*, the Supreme Experience.<sup>14</sup> The *Parameshvara* can be translated as either the "Supreme Lord" or "Shiva the Benign", this phrase is often interchanged with "*Parma Shiva*" which also translates to "the Supreme Shiva".<sup>15</sup> In *Trika* metaphysics, Shiva the supreme lord is the same as the self or soul of every being.<sup>16</sup> This means that Shiva is both mental perception and experiencing principle in both the abstract and real. This is how Lalla writes about Shiva, as an integrating reality, where Shiva is both the Self and the Soul of every being in the changeless Reality. For Lalla, Shiva is her lord, her one Reality.

---

<sup>12</sup> Roberts, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Temple, 161.

<sup>14</sup> Chatterji, xix.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The nature of Shiva is understood in a very multifaceted way, as God is understood in Islam through the 99 names. He has contradictory qualities, which are at the same time complimentary. Shiva is known to most as the destroyer of the universe at the end of the Kali Yuga. He is the third god in the *trimurti*, the Hindu trinity of gods, where Brahma is called the creator, and Vishnu is the preserver. However, for his devotees the Shaivites he plays the role of all three. His followers, Lalla among them, refer to him as the creator and the protector.<sup>17</sup> Shiva is a deity of contrasts for many. He is a god of ambiguity and paradox. He has been described as an erotic ascetic, which would be a paradox similar to ones found in religious traditions like Christianity and Buddhism.<sup>18</sup> He is the Divine yogi, who is disciplined and celibate, and at the same time is the lover of his spouse, often referred to as Shakti, Parvati, or Uma (sometimes referred to as the name of a local goddess). His spouse Shakti is the divine energy without which the world would cease to move.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while he is known as the matted-haired ascetic, he is also the ideal family man, who with his wife Parvati produced two sons Ganesha and Skanda.<sup>20</sup>

Shiva is the cause of the periodic destruction of the universe, which occurs during his frenzied dance. Yet at the same time, this dance is also a creative act, where the rhythms of the throbbing drum cause the cosmos to dance. Therefore, Shiva holds very conflicting characteristics, often embodied by

---

<sup>17</sup> Dimmitt, Cornelia, and JAB Buitenen. *Classical Hindu Mythology a Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas..* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Doniger, Wendy. *Asceticism and eroticism in the mythology of Śiva* . London: Oxford University Press, 1973, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Dimmitt, 148.

<sup>20</sup> Flood, Gavin. *An introduction to Hinduism* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005,150.

variety of other Hindu gods. These polarities in his personality point to the contrasting characteristic of his “auspicious” nature, which is the direct meaning of his name from Sanskrit. In the *Puranas*, he is written about extensively. Yet, scholars often note, that he appeared earlier in the Rig Veda under the name Rudra, or howler.<sup>21</sup> The story of Rudra depicts him being created from the breath of Brahma, the creator. He is described as having leapt out of the mouth of Brahma, “like a thousands suns blazing like the Fire at the end of the Age”.<sup>22</sup> He was born howling most terribly, and thus named by Brahma as “the howler”.<sup>23</sup>

However, it is Shiva who is at the center of origin in Hinduism. He is believed to have generated being at the time of original creation by sexual coupling with his spouse, often described as the female half of Shiva himself. It is Shiva and his female counterpart, Shakti, or power, which are written about in the *Puranas*. Through their relationship between the prakriti, the female, and purusa, the male aspects of creation are discussed. It is the combination of Shiva and his Shakti, which are often modeled into human sexual generation in Shaivite tradition.<sup>24</sup> He is often depicted and described as both female and male, and is therefore half male and half female, referred to as *ardhanarisvara*.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Shaivite mystic, whether a man or woman, is someone who practices a series of processes which lead him towards the total fusion with the Truth by combining both aspects of Shiva—the masculine and the feminine.<sup>26</sup> We cannot

---

<sup>21</sup> Dimmitt, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Doniger, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Flood, 151

<sup>26</sup> Chatterji, xix.

confirm that Lalla followed these series of processes, however the nature of Shiva understood in Shaivism is clearly visible in her *vaakhs*. Lalla writes about Shiva in his total form, which composes eternal Consciousness, Reality, and Truth in her saying.

The question of Lalla's formal training is based on the lack of knowledge and documentation regarding women's role in Shaivite spiritual lineage in the 14th century. According to M. V. Roberts, women are only written about in the *Kaula* branch of Shaivism, where female practitioners or *yoginis* serve almost exclusively as conduits for their male partners in esoteric sexual rites. However, as Roberts notes, Lalla does not make any explicit reference to the *Kaula* rites.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is hard to define the exact boundaries of Shaivism within which Lalla existed.

Based on record available from several Persian hagiographers, M. V. Roberts reveals that Lalla was brought up in a Brahmin family. As a result Lalla was involved in ordinary, regular worship of the deities and was at least aware of *Tantra* and Yoga.<sup>28</sup> The theology of Shaivism has been called non-dualistic or Advaita Shaivism, which many European and American academics often define as monistic idealism. This ideology is the backbone of Kashmiri Shaivism, which is plentiful in Lalla's works. However, such a philosophy creates the issue between the experience of diversity or the relationship between the one and the many. Shiva is the absolute truth, but also understood relatively through *Shakti* or *maya*.

---

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, 39

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps this is why M. V. Roberts called Kashmiri Shaivism “a hybrid between what we might call realism and idealism”.<sup>29</sup> In Shaivite philosophy, despite the reality of objects, which theologians defend vigorously, they are not independent of the consciousness that perceives them. Therefore, the consciousness and its objects are two forms of the same reality. Shaivism is, however, more than just a philosophy, it is a way of experiencing life. It provides a very in-depth understanding of both the macrocosmic universe and the microcosmic human being. The teachings of Shaivism, like various other philosophical and mystical traditions, helps people to understand the direct, intimate divine experience. For Shaivite, Shiva is the nature of *Chidananda* that is Consciousness and Bliss.<sup>30</sup> The world is a manifestation of Shiva’s Consciousness. Overall, Shaivism is concerned with returning humans to their primordial existence by focusing upon lifting the ‘human condition’ through complete focus upon Shiva—a monistic philosophy.

The term Kashmir Shaivism is somewhat misleading, because there are so many different schools that fall underneath its umbrella. As noted earlier, there was more than one form of Shaivism prevalent in Kashmir. Of the schools of *Trika*, *Kaula*, and *Krama*, and various manifestation of Shaivite religion itself. *Trika* is a Shiva sectarian philosophy that evolved in Kashmir in the middle ages. Therefore, when I refer to Kashmiri Shaivism in light of Lalla’s life, I am specifically referencing the *Trika* tradition. This form of Shaivite religion contains

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Chatterji, xvii.



teachings found in Samkhya (and perhaps Yoga) system of Indian religious thought.<sup>31</sup>

In *Trika*, Shiva is more than just the destructive god or a yogi of the *Puranas*; he is the supreme Truth and the eternal Self in all things within the cosmos. The works of these sages are embedded within the basic philosophy of *Trika*, which we will discuss later. Shiva is the root consciousness that pervades everything. Lalla writes that Shiva is the all-pervading vitality that has no name, cast, nor form.<sup>32</sup> Shiva is often spoken of in a monotheistic manner, very similar to a Muslim Sufi who maybe referring to the one God.

You are the Lord to create the world and all that has form.  
You, the Lord, breathed life into all skeletons.  
You are the Lord to sound without striking.  
Who can, O *Deva*, know your magnitude?<sup>33</sup>

The sages of Kashmir are called the *shaktipata*, or those upon whom the grace of Shiva has been granted, and so they know the Truth.<sup>34</sup> This form is the cornerstone of the entire philosophy of *Pratyabhijna Darshana*. These individuals have saved themselves from the limited human condition and have uncovered the bliss of divine Consciousness, which can be attained through the combination of the male and female energies of the cosmos—in totality forming Shiva. Although Lalla is considered to have attained ultimate status in her spiritual journey, it cannot be firmly asserted that she gained this title of *shaktipata*.

---

<sup>31</sup> Temple, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Vaakh 122. Lalla's *vaakh* as quoted in this research are based on Nil Kanth Kotru's translation. (See Kotru, Nil Kanth. *Lal Ded: Her Life & Sayings*. Delhi: Utpal Publications, 1989.)

<sup>33</sup> Vaakh 131.

<sup>34</sup> Chatterji, xvii.

Oddly enough, the realization of a non-dualistic truth in Kashmir Shaivism is embedded in the combination of two dual natures of the masculine and feminine, which can be understood through the relationship and importance of Shiva, Atman, Shakti, Tattavas, and method of initiation and final experience of a Shaivite, all of which Lalla explores in some manner. Through these components of Kashmiri Shaivism, it can be demonstrated that while this group of religious devotees focus on one God of the Hindu trinity, they find complete totality in his being. Lalla like other Shaivites strived to become like Shiva and his wife Parvati in union. Therefore the goal of the Shaivite is to find true consciousness of Shiva, which can be attained by combination of both the Prakriti, female energy symbolized by Shiva's spouse, and Purusa, the male energy symbolized by Shiva himself.

At one level of divine manifestation, Shiva and Shakti are personal deities. Lalla talks about how they are "formless appearing in various forms"<sup>35</sup>, as did Kabir with this *nirguana* reality of God. For Lalla, the Lord Shiva continually performs the five cosmic activities of creation, persistence, destruction, concealment, and grace.<sup>36</sup> Lalla talks in detail about this relationship. She says

For ever the sun rises and sets,  
For ever Shiva creates and dissolves and creates again.<sup>37</sup>

In the same way, Lalla discusses maya, as understood in the Trika system, in Vaakh 136. The Trika school of Kashmir Shaivism elevated Shakti to prominence. Perhaps it is this for this reason Lalla mentions Shakti twice in

---

<sup>35</sup> Vaakh 123.

<sup>36</sup> Roberts, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Vaakh 116.

conjunction to Shiva in Vaakh 130 and 134. On the other hand, M. V. Robert notes that Lalla names Shiva as the Absolute reality in at least twenty verses.<sup>38</sup> This includes her references to Shiva with names such as Shankar, Parameshvara<sup>39</sup>, Sambhu<sup>40</sup>, and the Blue-throated One<sup>41</sup>.

Even though Lalla only names the divine couple twice in her verses, their vitality is key to understanding Lalla's thought process. The relationship between the two is understood as *spanda* or vibration in Lalla's texts.<sup>42</sup> The two are understood as continual oscillation between the subject and object through which the universe manifests itself. This means that the universe depends on every moment upon divine consciousness (Shiva) and upon the power to sustain it (Shakti). This results in a constant outpouring of manifestation, which Shaivism describes as the light of perception that results from the light of consciousness (Shiva) and the light of awareness (Shakti).<sup>43</sup> All Kashmiri Shaivism believes the cosmos result from the unity of Shiva and his Shakti, however they also emphasize the dualism presented by these two entities. Roberts describes this as an ocean and a wave, where the "waves of particularity rise and fall on the ocean of consciousness."<sup>44</sup>

This relationship manifests through symbols in Lalla's sayings, she conveys the unity and the distinction of the couple. She writes,

I saw Shiva and Shakti rolled in one.

---

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, 172.

<sup>39</sup> Vaakh 95.

<sup>40</sup> Vaakh 67.

<sup>41</sup> Vaakh 128.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, 174.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Overwhelmed with joy I got immersed there itself in the lake of nectar.  
Now I shall die while alive; what can the world unto me?<sup>45</sup>

She explains this seemingly sexual metaphor as a realization and liberation from human life a realization of truth. These two entities generate the energy of the entire cosmos. According to her *vaakhs*, Lalla became aware of this very energy. While talk of union for the divine couple is crucial to both the philosophy of Lalla and Kashmiri Shaivism, it is their independent existence that sustains the cosmos. When the two become one, the “universe dissolves”.<sup>46</sup>

The couple may not be mentioned many times in Lalla’s *vaakhs*, but their significance is very profound in the two *vaakhs* she did write about them. Her works are based on a great deal of Kashmiri Shaivism, and the concept of the Divine couple is at the crux of understanding Kashmiri monism through duality. Shiva and Shakti explain the ultimate principle, which describe the relationship between perception and awareness in the works and theories of Lalla.

### *Atman, Shakti, and Tattavas*

The ultimate nature of experiencing being, in Shaivism and the larger umbrella of Hinduism, is the *atman*. The *atman* is the true and innermost Self in every being, is a changeless reality. It is a purely experience principle, which is different than whatever may assume form of either the experience or the means of experience.<sup>47</sup> It can also be referred to as *Chaitanya* or *Para Samvit* (the

---

<sup>45</sup> Vaakh 130.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Flood, 1

supreme Shiva), that is the supreme experience. “Shiva and Shakti are not aware that they are separate. They are interconnected just as fire is one with heat.”<sup>48</sup> They are incorporated in a Divine marriage, which manifests itself within the Universe on a cosmological level and on the human level.<sup>49</sup> This is the reality that underlies every experience and everything in the universe in Shaivite religion and philosophy.

This supreme Shiva is beyond the limits of time, space, and form, while also being embodied within it. Shiva pervades the universe and a transcendental aspect in which He is beyond all universal manifestations. The vast universality with its infinitude in material objects, means, and experience is all a manifestation of the Supreme Shiva, the immanent aspect of *Parma Shiva* himself. It is this creative power; often referred to as Shakti, His feminine aspect which are both at play in equanimity.

All aspects of Shakti are aspects of an infinite number of modes in which *Parma Shiva* manifests himself. The collective state of the Universe is His supreme Energy. Shiva created Shakti as the embodiment of the universe, while Shiva loves possessing the state of God-Consciousness. However, she is in constant state of ignorance, remaining perfectly complete and full in every way in the universe.<sup>50</sup> That is, Shiva created Shakti so that his own nature can be recognized—just as in various Semitic religions, like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God creates creation, especially mankind as a manifestation of his own

---

<sup>48</sup> Hughes, John. *Self realization in Kashmir Shaivism: the oral teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo*. Albany (N.Y.): State university of New York press, 1995, 22.

<sup>49</sup> Shulman, David Dean. *Tamil temple myths: sacrifice and divine marriage in the South Indian Saiva tradition*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

<sup>50</sup> Hughes, 23.

nature. Consequently, the various components of Shakti exhibit ignorance, and at the same time provide a method to rid of ignorance. “This is the way of meditating in the activity of the world.” In the external universe, Shakti is created by Shiva as a means for mankind to realize his own nature of the Parma Shiva, just as God manifests himself in the created world of the Semitic religions in various attributes to make himself accessible to mankind.

The Limitless Shiva has to limit himself in order to create creation. In that way, the overflow of Shiva’s nature is Shakti, which he had to separate Himself from. “In that state of separated Shakti, the Supreme Shiva still lives.” However in this state Shiva is ignorant and wants, as He did before, to have the fullness of his Knowledge.<sup>51</sup> This is the characteristic of the human Shaivite. Ultimately, “the supreme Lost Shiva, who is all-pervasive and fond of playing and falling, together with the energy of His own nature simultaneously brings about the varieties of creation and destruction”<sup>52</sup>. Consequently, the Universe is only an expansion of the power of the Supreme Shiva himself—that is an expansion of Shiva in his Shakti.

It is this Shakti that perpetuates the cosmos eternally, through the various cycles of the cosmos. In a perpetual cycle, she opens herself out and then gathers herself back in. “She has gone on repeating the process eternally, they’re being to it neither an absolute beginning nor a final ending.”<sup>53</sup> Through her actions there are phases of manifestation, explicitation, and potentiality. She brings the universe into existence during the phases of manifestation, and

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Chatterji, 6.

reduces it to seminal state or form, when she follows into the potential phase. Technically, these phases are called *kalpas*, which means imagining, assuming, or ideating.<sup>54</sup>

While the creation of Shakti is infinite, her consistent opening up results in the manifestation of the fundamental factors in Shaivite cosmology called the *tattavas*, which is 'thatness' or 'whatness' of everything that exists. In Shaivite Philosophy there are 36 *tattavas*, which are divided into 3 groups: *Shuddha tattavas*, *Shuddha-ashuddha tattavas*, and *ashuddha tattavas*.<sup>55</sup> The *Shuddha tattavas* are the 'pure' *tattavas*, they are the first and pure elements of Shiva, which include *Shiva*, *Shakti*, *Sadasive*, *Ishvara*, and *Shuddhavidya*<sup>56</sup>. They are followed by the *Shuddha-ashuddha tattavas*, which are the 'pure-impure' *tattavas*, they include *maya* (ignorance, creativity), *kala*, (limited active energy), *vidya* (limited energy of knowledge), and *niyati* (limitation of place).<sup>57</sup> This group is confined to the limited individual experience, perpetuating from *maya* itself.

There are the last *ashuddha tattavas*, or the impure *tattavas*. These include *prakriti* (nature), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahmakara* (ego), *manas* (mind), *shriotra* (ear), *vak* (sound), *pani* (hand), *pada*, (feet), *payu* (organ of defecation), *upastha* (organ of urination), *sabda* (sound), *sparsha* (touch), *rupa* (form), *rasa* (taste), *gandha* (smell), *akasha* (ether), *vayu* (wind), *vahni* (fire) *salila* (water), and *bhumi* (earth).<sup>58</sup> In totality all 36 *tattavas* are created in the nature of the Parama Shiva. Each *tattavas* within itself includes an in-depth discussion,

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Hughes, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

however this paper will not go into their details as it is not pertinent to the paper's discussion. Nonetheless, it is imperative to understand that in Kashmir Shaivism, these *tattavas* are inclusive of material consciousness and of material existence.

Chatterji explains the relationship between Shiva and all the *tattavas*,

Transcending them all [*tattavas*], yet pervading and permeating them all, there stands Parma Shiva or Para Samvit, the supremest Experience, beyond and unaffected by all time, space, and relation, but yet alone making the existence of the manifested universe, constituted of the *Tattavas* possible.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, what is true of *Parma Shiva* is also true of each of the *tattavas*.

While Shiva pervades all the *tattavas*, as he expels Shakti, he remains unaffected. He stands beyond them all, transcending them all—and in the same way so does each *tattava* in regard to all the other *tattavas*, which succeed it. “In other words, the lowest *tattava* involves all the higher ones as each successively lower *tattava* involves the ones which precede it.”<sup>60</sup>

Therefore the product of these *tattavas*, according to Chatterji, can be considered an ‘involution’. Where the reality of the Shiva is involved more and more, and as it descends towards the stage at which it appears to be physical.<sup>61</sup> At the same time it is an experience of differentiation and multiplication. The ultimate Reality of *Parama Shiva* constantly involves itself repeatedly, until it produces a multiplicity of units (various *tattavas*). Consequently there are “an infinite number classes of *tattavas* from the *Purusha*, wrapped in his fivefold *Kanshucka*, down to the *Prithivi*”.<sup>62</sup> They act and react to one another, creating further complications. Different *tattavas* interact between themselves are each of

---

<sup>59</sup> Chatterji, 105.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 108.



them is separate and mutually exclusive limited entity. The analogy of biological cells in the human body can be used to understand this phenomena, where each cell is alive on its own and has its own existence. However, together these cells form a single living organism.

Although *tattavas* and the universe's experience is different for each experiencing entity, they come forth from a unity, a collective existence that behaves as continuous single entity—the Parma Shiva. As experiences have collective existences, their universe goes through similar forming experience at different stages of the realization, ultimately leading to Parma-Shiva.

We cannot confirm if Lalla passed through all the *tattavas* as described by Trika philosophy. There is a great lack of proper documentation of any training she may have received in this. Also there is a question of her gender, and whether women were even taught the how to pass through different *tattavas* as aspirants. However, we can assume that she was aware of the Parma Shiva, to whom she refers often in her sayings.

According to Lalla's sayings, she liberates herself from the lower *tattavas* to attain *Shiva tattava* or nameless consciousness. She teaches that no matter how liberated a person may be, they live in the world of name, form, and duality and therefore continue to experience the "lower *tattavas*".<sup>63</sup> Roberts points to a few verses that explicitly highlight Lalla's awareness of the lower *tattavas*. She writes that "Food and raiment do not pacify a restless mind" in vaakh 30. The lower *tattavas* provide distraction and no answers to the mind that is in search the eternal, spoken from the aspect of the Absolute.

---

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, 184.

Lalla writes about Shiva as the condensation of reality or consciousness. She talks about him in metaphor to explain his nature to his contemporaries.

What should we offer you in worship  
you are the sky, you are the earth;  
you are the air, the day and the night,  
You are the sacrificial grain, the sandal paste,  
you the flowers, the water and all that exists.<sup>64</sup> (K70)

Lalla attempts to explain the all-pervasive nature of the One God, and enters every home<sup>65</sup>, how he is the sun that warms every place<sup>66</sup>, and forces breath into any animate frame He desires.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, like her Sufi contemporaries, she warns if you cannot see Shiva during your lifetime, how can you expect to meet Him after death?<sup>68</sup>

Therefore understanding Parma Shiva is the basic, most essential duty of the Shaivite aspirant. This is done through transcending the *tattavas*. Lalla makes this method accessible to the masses by explaining this theory in her simple language. She not only transcended the *tattavas*, but she also presented a method to do so without ritual of initiation or spiritual lineage—both of which she may not have had.

### *Shaivite Mysticism*

The *atman*, the relationship of *Shakti-Shiva*, and the thirty-six *tattavas* together form the method to God Consciousness for the Shaivite. Although Lalla does not believe in doctrine or ritual, this philosophy is embedded in the

---

<sup>64</sup> Vaakh 70.

<sup>65</sup> Vaakh 79.

<sup>66</sup> Roberts, 184.

<sup>67</sup> Vaakh 82 and 131.

<sup>68</sup> Vaakh 82.

philosophy of her *vaakhs*. An initiate of some Kashmiri Shaivites includes the recitation of the ultimate *mantra*. Although there is no documentation that Lalla received any mantra, she writes about having received a *vachan* from her guru that led her to enlightenment. This could possibly have been the mantra that initiates receive.

Different scholars attribute various gurus and teachers to Lalla. For this reason it becomes difficult to place her into a particular group of Shaivites. According to her sayings, her contact with her “guru” was limited to a single meeting, which served as her “initiation”.<sup>69</sup> In the only poem she talks about her guru, she explains that she received from him a “word” or *vachan*, which lead her to realization of the Ultimate Self. She says,

My Guru gave me but one precept,  
“From without withdraw your gaze within  
And fix it on the inmost Self.”  
I, Lalla, took to hear this one precept,  
And therefore naked I began to dance.<sup>70</sup>

But these verses do not confirm who her guru was, and to what religious tradition he might have belonged.

The field of *mantras*, or sacred word, in Kashmiri Shaivism is like consuming of the sacred itself. In that way to recite a mantra that digests the thirty-six *tattavas* of Shaivism is to consume the totality of Parma Shiva. This caliber of mantra is called *sauh*, it is the byproduct of the digestion of the thirty-six elements. Such a mantra is not creative, rather it is destructive in nature, because it completes the cycle of the thirty-six elements.<sup>71</sup> In such a mantra is

---

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, 35-36.

<sup>70</sup> Vaakh 21.

<sup>71</sup> Hughes, 67.

exhibited the method in which to wind-up, discard the thirty-six elements, and in the end find peace and rest in Shiva. Although, there is no record of Lalla having received a *mantra*, the *vachan* in her *vaakhs* is often understood to serve this purpose.

John Hughes, a 20<sup>th</sup> century American scholar of Kashmiri Shaivism, provides us with an interesting example from Ksemaraja, a Kashmir Shaivite sage, in describing how crucial the initiation mantra is to Shaivite doctrine. Ksemaraja gives the example of the *nyagrodha* tree. He notes that the *nyagrodha* tree is a giant and majestic fig tree with a trunk ten times bigger than most other trees.<sup>72</sup> Yet this tree, which is huge, produces very tiny seeds. Within each seed exists the strength and the power to produce the giant tree. In this way the mantra is like the tree, and all thirty-six *tattavas* are composed within each small seed, which on its own is a totality—the Parma Shiva, the goal of the Shaivite.

The Universe is composed the Shakti and Shiva's play, and consists of the thirty-six elements that reside in the *mantra sauh*. The *mantra sauh* is called the heart *mantra*<sup>73</sup> as it is the essence of all mantras in Kashmir Shaivism. This is the same as the substances of ice and water, which are produced by water substance, and are actually water. Or how a clay plate is still the earthen clay, which as the essence is still the clay.

Consequently, from *prithivi* (earth) and *maya* (pollution, creativity), there is the existence (*sat*) the reality of all these elements. All these elements eternally

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

exist within the *Parama Shiva*, who is also independent of them. Kshemaraja talks in detail regarding the nature of *sat*. In Hughes book, he says “*Sat* consists of two parts, the suffix *sa* and *at*. The suffix *at* is only present within the word to help with pronunciation. On the other hand, the suffix *sa* is from the Sanskrit verbal root *as*, which means ‘to be’. Therefore, leaving *at* aside, *sa* composes all the *tattavas*.<sup>74</sup> All the *tattavas* are embodiment of the *nara*, the individual, yet at the same time of *Parama Shiva*.

However, this oneness of God consciousness is not accepted in the last thirty-one *tattavas*, (where the first five are composed in the last two sounds). These thirty-one *tattavas* are scattered, and do not accept the unity of God—*Parama Shiva*. These *tattavas* have not accepted the oneness of God Consciousness, which a human must digest in his or her nature. The middle part of *sauh* is the letter *au*, which is superior to *sa*.<sup>75</sup> This *au* contains elements that embody Shakti, including the embodiment of acceptance of the unity of God. The sound *au*, composes the middle three *tattavas*, which include will the *Suddhavidya*, *Isvara*, and *Sadsasiva* *tattavas*, and accept God’s unity.<sup>76</sup>

Finally is the *h* sound in the *sauh*. Within this *h* sound is a twofold creative energy of the first two *tattavas*, that of *Shiva* and that of *Shakti*.<sup>77</sup> The first is the higher creative energy and the latter a lower creative energy. In the *Trika* system—which is Shaivite monism within *Pratyabhijna Darshana*, Kashmir Shaivism—this *mantra* forms the cycle of *Parama Shiva*, which is composed of

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 69.

*nara, Shakti, and Shiva*.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the *mantra sauh* is the supreme *mantra* that it is above all other mantras, which includes all blessed *mantras*. It is transcendent and is the essence of *Trika* monism. Therefore, Parama Shiva is always in the state of flowing out and resting.

Consequently, in Kashmir Shaivism, the final experience of the mystic is not synonymous to annihilation of the self. Nor does the mystic become mystical or eternal and disconnected from life. Rather he or she acquires an exalted feeling. This state as called the *Lokananda samadhi sukham* according to the Shiva Sutras<sup>79</sup>. This means the ‘ecstasy of the world is the bliss of Samadhi’, which is the experience of meditation encompassing all of Shiva’s creation, according to Shaivism. Chatterji quotes Swami Muktanana, a Kashmiri Shaivite, describing the state of Realized Being:

Such a person does not shrink from the world, he accepts the world as it comes. We on the spiritual path, we accept what is good and reject what is bad, but in this way we alienate ourselves from the world. A true devotee of God [Shiva] accepts the world as it is and by the power of his love transforms it. As long as we reject the world, the world will reject us. When you love the world s God, the world loves and gives you its grace.<sup>80</sup>

In Shaivism the world is not unreal. Rather to be alive in the world is to be part of Shiva’s constant play, and thus to be part of this world is to realize the inner-self as Shiva, and world as Shiva. Consequently, his followers stop feeling alienated from the world around them.

To realize the *Parama Shiva*, a Shaivite must recognize the play between Shiva and Shakti, and the *tattavas* that emanate from within it. In totality, the

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Chatterji, xxii.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

love, realization, and acceptance of God, Shiva, and his attributes are the realization of true God consciousness—the goal of Kashmir Shaivism. While Lalla’s work suggest she attained *lakananda samadhi sukham*, it cannot be dismissed that she may have also attain “self-annihilation” or *fana’* in Sufism. Her *vaakhs* speak of both the exalted feeling and self-annihilation as if producing an entirely different state of freedom from the physical human life that includes but transcends both these forms of salvation.

While Lalla might have undergone initiation into Shaivite doctrine and ritual after the cultivation of appropriate yogic disciplines, no sources confirm her view as an “insider” status—a necessity for salvation and liberation from *samsara*.<sup>81</sup> She spoke in the vernacular, and attempted to make liberating awareness accessible to all lay people. Her writings speak out against unnecessary ritual and indoctrination. Therefore, her sayings do not reflect the common practices of Shaivism. Her oral transmissions are a subversive act to resist discourse to which many people of her time did not have access.<sup>82</sup> Regardless of the real status of her initiation into a particular spiritual lineage, her sayings have little interest in perpetuating such institutions. Therefore, her sayings are clear, simple, and concise and are written very accessible to the masses.<sup>83</sup>

For Lalla, the world is not a creation, but rather it is an emanation or a theophany of Shiva, the one God. The world therefore pours out from the Divine, and Shiva externalizes himself creating the physical. This creates the cycle of

---

<sup>81</sup> Roberts, 36-41.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

*samsara*. According to Lalla's, this vast water of creation expands and is eternal renewed. She says,

The mind is new, so is the moon.  
The vast expanse of water that I have seen is ever new.  
Since the day I, Lalla cleansed my body and mind  
I am ever new and new.<sup>84</sup>

She discusses the three levels of creation based on the relationship between Shiva in *vaakh* 85. According to Roberts, here she discusses the creation of the earth, atmosphere, and sky; past, present, and future; physical, spiritual, and transcendental.<sup>85</sup>

Based upon this cosmology, Lalla presents a manner in which to purify the self. She makes this accessible to all. She explains how through awareness, she can sense things differently until she attains the highest *tattavas*, until only the void remains.<sup>86</sup> This void, is arguably similar to, if not the same as, the goal of self-annihilation in mystical Islam known as *fana'*. However, the language and philosophy of Shaivism is unmistakable, and touches upon cosmological and metaphysical concepts that are embedded deeply in Kashmiri Shaivite thought.

Lalla spoke in vernacular of her everyday life and did not use complicated language. Her goal was to liberate awareness that was accessible to all people, therefore she used the language that the majority of the Kashmiri population would understand, and consequently she often alluded to Shaivite ideas and vocabulary. This should not be used as the basis to limit her to any single religious tradition, but be understood as the spatial and lingual limitation to her message. Lalla's speaking style cannot supersede the content of her what she

---

<sup>84</sup> Vaakh 137.

<sup>85</sup> Roberts, 177.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 184.



said, and her *vaakhs* certainly did not limit her to any religion on the basis of location or language.

Lalla says, when all things annihilate, “what remains is the truth to know”.<sup>87</sup> This is similar to the definition of the highest Shiva *tattavas* of nameless consciousness. At the same time it is also the Sufi concept of the *fana'*, which is the annihilation of the self and lies beyond rational awareness. The realization of Parma Shiva and the concept of *fana'* are often defined and explained in the same way, therefore *vaakh* 134 could be referring to either religion. In light of this, Lalla serves a synthesizers of various religious schools, including Hinduism and Islam. R. C. Temple wrote that she had influences from Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, which are not as evident in her texts. It can be firmly deduced from her *vaakh*, as M. V. Roberts highlights, she polarized towards having an “esoteric” doctrine.<sup>88</sup> It is possible that Lalla under went initiation by a guru that followed Trika philosophy, than proceeded to the Yogic tradition, and finally to Sufi teachings.

In her *Vakh-yani* she does not mention that she learned things through sacred texts.<sup>89</sup> N. K. Kaul writes that some part of the education Lalla received was in Sanskrit, and her *vaakhs* suggest that she has some degree of Shaivite systematic study.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, M. V. Roberts questions the extent of contact she made with Sanskrit texts of the Tantra and Agamas.<sup>91</sup> However, these are all conjectures, and there is no clear indicator exactly how she came by

---

<sup>87</sup> Vaakh 134.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Vaakh 47.

<sup>90</sup> Kaul, Jai Lal. *Lal Ded*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1973, 33.

<sup>91</sup> Roberts, 35.

her familiarity with shared concepts of schools of Kashmiri Shaivism and weather she actually received formal initiation into Shaivite doctrine and ritual.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Roberts, 36.

## Chapter 3

### Islam

#### *The Coming of Islam to India*

The first Muslims migrated to Kashmir in 712 CE. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, a contemporary American Muslim scholar of Islam in Kashmir, approximates that the first Muslims came from Syria and as an entourage of Jaisiya, which defeated the Prince of the neighboring Sindh.<sup>93</sup> Not much was written about Muslims from then to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to M. Ishaq Khan, Islam entered northern India as early as 724-761 CE, when Islam entered through Persian traders and migrating soldiers. One such example is Harsha who lived during 1008-1101 CE, He is said to have recruited soldiers and introduced Muslim influence in Kashmir of dress and ornament.<sup>94</sup> In addition, Khan notes, that during the reign of Bhiksacarar around 1120-1121 CE Muslims soldiers were employed in Lahara, India.<sup>95</sup> Finally, according to Khan, by the 13<sup>th</sup> century there were full blown colonies in Kashmir.<sup>96</sup> Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, the apostle of Kashmir entered the region between 1314-1384 CE.<sup>97</sup> He belonged to branch of Suhrawardi order of Sufis known as Kubrawis. It was Hamadani that brought this order to Kashmir. The Kubrawis dominate the religious establishment of Srinagar, Kashmir to this day. Hamadani is believed to have converted thirty-

---

<sup>93</sup> Rafiabadi, Hamid Naseem. *Islam and Sufism in Kashmir: some lesser known dimensions*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2009, vi.

<sup>94</sup> Khan, 2003, 342.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

seven thousand Kashmiris to Islam.<sup>98</sup> The Kashmiri Hindu chief Rinchana's converted to Islam along with his tribe during the first current of Hamadani's influence, and later Rinchana became the first Muslim sultan of Kashmir.<sup>99</sup> During this time, Muslims Shah Mir defeated Hindu local leader Kota Rani's forces, he later founded a new ruling dynasty and established stronger threshold of Islam in the region.<sup>100</sup> All of these events started a process, which was due to undermine the very basis of caste-oriented social order. Above all, these currents manifested in the bold protest by Lalla against the supremacy of Brahmin priests and the social inequalities of her age.<sup>101</sup> Lalla "is best remembered for her crusades against Brahmanical hegemony and the oppression of the so-called lower castes".<sup>102</sup> In her *vaakhs*, she addresses both Hindus and Muslims, where she preaches social equality and oneness of God.

Medieval Indian society was largely agricultural Brahmanic society,<sup>103</sup> which gradually encountered Islam through adventurers, traders, and refugees many centuries before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.<sup>104</sup> Others like Eleanor Zelliot, a contemporary American scholar of medieval India, argued that Islam found its way into India first around about 1336 based on the documentation of the death of Nizam al-Din Auliya, the Chief of the Chisti saints

---

<sup>98</sup> Rafiabadi, vi.

<sup>99</sup> Khan, 2003, 343.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Rafiabadi, 135.

<sup>103</sup> Hasan, S. Nurul. State society and religion in medieval India . New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, 28.

<sup>104</sup> Khan, Mohammad Ishaq. Kashmir's transition to Islam: the role of Muslim rishis (15th-18th Century). 4th ed. Kashmir: Gulshan Books, 2005, 1.

of South Asia.<sup>105</sup> Nizam al-Din was responsible for the spread of his ideas in Daulatabad, India. His sayings spread as a collection, similar to Lalla's *vaakhs*, called *Faw'id* Alfu'ad.<sup>106</sup> The transition of Kashmir to Islam can largely be attributed to Sufi orders of the region.

Islam entered the scene in an aggregation system, where the polity was without an adequate understanding of the position of the ruling class.<sup>107</sup> Islam penetrated through conquest of the Turks and through Sufi Islam. Contemporary British and American Scholars of Indian religions, including Thomas Arnold, Tara Chang, and Richard Maxwell Eaton, argue that India was not forcibly converted to Islam. Kashmir serves as an ample example. For these scholars, Islam largely spread peacefully through Sufi missionary activity similar to that of Christian activity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, Islam came to certain regions through financial pressures, by way of *jizya* (tax) upon non-Muslims by Muslim rulers. Authors like I. H. Qureshi deny this entirely, although according to M. Ishaq Khan this probably has some seed of truth. For Khan, Islam appealed to most because it freed them from their social limitation and established an egalitarian Muslim community.

Early Turkish socio-political structure took on the style of its predecessors the Rajput kingdoms, where they exercised varying degrees of control over local chiefs who were usually non-Rajput and belonged to indigenous tribes and lower

---

<sup>105</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. "A Medieval Encounter Between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath's Drama-Poem Hindu-Turk Samvad." In *India's Islamic traditions, 711-1750*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003. 64.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Hasan, 30.

castes.<sup>108</sup> The Turkish rulers overthrew many of the bigger chiefs, leaving the smaller chiefs undisturbed, to obtain recognition of their sovereignty on varying terms and conditions. Between 13-15 centuries, wholesale displacement of local chiefs of the lower castes by the Rajputs occurred.<sup>109</sup> The Sultanate probably supported this, as there was close political and economic links between Sultanate and Rajput aristocracy. This led to decline of local authorities and establishment of centralized empire.<sup>110</sup>

The Delhi Sultanate was established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which changed the face of Islam in various nearby regions. The advising jurists, or *ulama*, wanted the Muslim Sultans to establish religious law as Islam dictates. However, there was no theoretical framework present at that time in which Muslim leaders ruled a pre-dominant non-Muslim polity. Therefore, S. Nurul Hasan, a contemporary American scholar of Islam in India, writes, it was decided by Royalty that the state could not administer Islamic law, or *Shari'ah*, in such a situation. The Sultan could administer this through force of nobility and military, but was reluctant to bound the state by *Shari'ah*, because it would not only circumscribe his authority, but also because it would not be practical to administer a kingdom with religious law where most of the population was not Muslim.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 66.

The Muslims of India were not a monolithic community during the Sultanate and Mughal periods.<sup>112</sup> India provided different ethnic, linguistic, regional, and class differences. Furthermore, the caste system inevitably penetrated the Muslims immigrant and convert population in India.<sup>113</sup> Therefore the idea of common religious identity only served a very limited purpose. The noble Turks identified themselves as elite, who spoke only Hindi, therefore separating themselves from the rest of Indian Muslims.<sup>114</sup> The majority of local converts retained the cultural heritage of their caste or profession after their conversion to Islam. Some converts attempted to improve their social status by claiming descent to well-known religious or cultural personalities.<sup>115</sup> Immigrants maintained their heritage and identity by keeping names that linked them to Persian or Arab decent.

It was not until the works of philanthropist Sufis, that through organization of the *kahqah*, that gradual process of Islamic acculturation began in Brahminic caste-based Kashmiri society. Among these Sufis are Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, who developed the devotion famous Kashmiri invocatory prayer *Aurad-i-Fathiyyah*<sup>116</sup>, Sheikh Nooruddin (1378-1439 CE), one of the first Muslim Rishis of Kashmir<sup>117</sup>, and Lalla Ded, the wandering Shaivite and Sufi wandering woman. These individuals broke the particularism of Brahmins, and denounced the caste system, idol worship, rituals associated with temple worship. Her

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 2.

contemporary Brahmins for her unconventional activity ostracized Lalla. On the other hand, she was preserved in the Islamic acculturation. According to M. I. Khan she was a “rebel against the Brahminic creed”.<sup>118</sup> Based upon this behavior, scholars like Khan, conclude that Lalla converted to Islam as it served as a religion of social liberation.

H. N. Rafiabadi emphasizes that Muslim Rishis, with the influence of Nooruddin, used concepts of spiritual annihilation (*fana'*) and self-realization to ennoble and humanize action to better the society of Kashmir. The coming of such Islamic currents was a gradual synthesis and syncretism, and not a violent take over. Islam came through Sufi practices that meshed into Shaivite concepts, but at the same time broke through Brahminic societal structures. Rafiabadi writes that Muslim Rishis with the influence of Mohammad Hamadani continued the process of Islamization of Kashmir.<sup>119</sup> Kashmiri Sufism developed to accommodate pre-existing Kashmiri popular religion. Sufi orders like the Suhrawardi, Naqashbandi, and Qadri Sufi played a great role in the process of Islamization of Kashmir.<sup>120</sup>

There is very little debate that Islam entered Kashmir in the form of Sufism. However, N. K. Kotru argues that the Sufism, which first entered Kashmir, was not the same as the “orthodox” Islamic tradition.<sup>121</sup> This can be largely attributed to Kotru’s limited understanding or misunderstanding between the relationship between Sufism and Islam. According to Kotru, Sufis came as

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>119</sup> Rafiabadi, vii.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, vii.

<sup>121</sup> Kotru, iii.



refugees on humanistic considerations from central Asia and Iran, and were received with sympathy and love by local Brahmins.<sup>122</sup> However, it is unclear from what source Kotru concluded this relationship. Therefore, such a statement simultaneously paints the Sufis in a helpless light and the Brahmins as their rescuers; and the motives behind such statements are questionable and largely socio-politically influenced. On the other hand, Kotru does write that the doctrines of the Sufis and the local people shared much in common.<sup>123</sup> This much can be observed from the basic Shaivite and Sufi language about monism and absolutism. Kotru does agree that all early Muslims in Kashmir were not Sufis; he admits that even during the early periods of conversion there were “orthodox Muslims” participants. It may be appropriate to describe this “orthodox” population as the most exoterically oriented population, who was concerned largely with Divine (*Shari’ah*) law. However, that does not make them entirely separate from the Sufi population. Kotru almost demonizes this “orthodox” population, as actively interfering with the politics of the country, which later resulted in narrow-minded policy of Sultans. Such statements suggest two possible inferences, which are historically questionable: first, that Sufism is not Islam, and secondly, that true Islam of later Sultans was an intolerant religion. These arguments confuse “militant religion” with “orthodoxy”, and are dangerous in that they limit the understanding of Lalla and history of Islam in Kashmiri.

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, iii.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## *Islam and Lalla*

Lalla flourished in Kashmir during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which was a period of religious and political turmoil.<sup>124</sup> According to N. K. Kotru, Lalla was born for “moral and spiritual uplifting of mankind, and did not belong to that category of saints, who are concerned with their own salvation.”<sup>125</sup> Few people received the titles of sainthood in the region vying for their own-salvation. However, in her *vaakhs* Lalla does write that she was aware of her reincarnations, and knew that she enjoyed God’s favor.<sup>126</sup> Her sayings suggest that she was aware of her destiny to serve as a universal spiritual guide to all humanity. She says,

Whatever I did became worship of the Lord,  
What my tongue pronounced became *mantra*.  
Whatever the body experience became *tanirik sahana*  
Leading to the realization of *Parma Shiva*.<sup>127</sup>

Lalla knew she was setting out to show humanity a way to the Lord. Today in Kashmir Hindus say that Lalla is a Hindu and Muslims speak about her conversion to Islam. She is a saint claimed by two religions, among both she fosters common values to an appreciable degree.<sup>128</sup> Her works promoted a type of inter-religious dialogue that is very visible in her sayings.

Lalla was born and brought up in a Brahmin family, and it was after she departed from the household of her in-laws that she encountered Islam through renowned Muslim scholars and mystics.<sup>129</sup> Her *vaakhs* address both Hindus as well as Muslim in their language and vocabulary. According to N. H. Rafiabadi,

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, iii.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, viii.

<sup>126</sup> Vaakh 26.

<sup>127</sup> Vaakh 138.

<sup>128</sup> Rafiabadi, 142.

<sup>129</sup> Rafiabadi, 135.

she came in contact with great Sufis like Hamadani, Samani, and finally Nooruddin Noorani, who carried on her philosophy after her death. Contrarily, N. K. Kotru attributes the compilation to J. L. Kaul, H. N. Rafiabadi attributes the authentic sources of Lalla's sayings and hagiography to *Asrar-ul-Abrar* of Baba Da'ud Khaki, who wrote about her in conjunction to her life with Muslim luminaries and legends attached to her.<sup>130</sup> The intriguing difference in attributing correct information about Lalla appears to be based on religious heritage. Her greatest eulogists have been Muslim hagiographers and Persian chroniclers—so much she has been called “Rabi’a Thani” or the second Rabia al-Adawiyya of Basra.<sup>131</sup> Sources from Lalla's contemporaries cannot be easily dismissed when attempting to untangle her life, and should be taken very seriously when exploring her as a great religious personality of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

According to M. I. Khan, scholarly attempts in this century have center around describing trying to reduce Lalla as only a proponent of Shaivism.<sup>132</sup> Such accounts ignores the earlier evidence in hagiographical accounts, which gives clear idea of Lalla's personality and testifies to the high esteem in which she was held by Muslims.<sup>133</sup> Khan suggests that the question, which needs to be fully examined, is why Mullah Raina, a close disciple of the Kashmiri Sufi Sheikh Hamza Muakhdum, along many other Muslim hagiographers granted a pre-eminent position to Lalla. Other Shaivite saints attracted little to no the attention of Persian hagiographers. As Khan's research suggests, regardless of the

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>131</sup> Khan, 2005, 349.

<sup>132</sup> Khan, 2003, 71.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

possibility that the hagiographers may be incorrectly recording Lalla's association with Sufis, these legends hold a substratum of truth about her friendliness with Islam.<sup>134</sup>

According to Rafiabadi, her contemporary Brahmin chroniclers largely ignored Lalla,<sup>135</sup> including Jonaraja, Shrivara, and Yodh Bhat.<sup>136</sup> According to Rafiabadi's research it is Nooruddin's eulogy to Lalla that is one of the first historical records of her life.<sup>137</sup> Nooruddin wrote that Lalla was a mystic and a saintly woman, who held a close and high station with the Divine. Often, the relationship between Lalla and Nooruddin, like that of Lalla and Hamadani, is entirely dismissed as folklore. However, H. N. Rafiabadi, similar to M. Ishaq Khan, argues that there is significance in folklore and legend, which are the lungs of rural Kashmiri culture.<sup>138</sup> History can be rendered meaningfully through use of legendary and mystical events.

He uses the silence of the Brahmin on Lalla's life, as an argument for her status in Kashmiri Shaivism. According to this viewpoint, Lalla was not claimed as a Shaivite saint until much later than the Muslims revered her as a holy woman. Writers like Akbar Hayderi challenged scholarly circles, who question Lalla's interaction and conversion to Islam.<sup>139</sup>

Muslim hagiographer Khawaja Azam Kashmiri notes that Lalla's grave is in the premise of the shrine of the great Sufi master, Baba Nasebuddin

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Rafiabadi, 139.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>138</sup> Rafiabadi, 144.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Bijbehra.<sup>140</sup> According to various hagiographical accounts, Lalla was dissatisfied with the masses and found alternatives by seeking the company of Sufis who settled in the villages surrounding Kashmir. This includes great Sufi figures such as Sayyid Husain Samani, who settled in Kulgram during the reign of the Sultan Shihabuddin.<sup>141</sup> However, it is not only the possibility of conversion that led Brahmin chroniclers to avoid documenting Lalla's life and works. Such can attributed to Lalla's revolt against the conventions of Brahmin life. Lalla's poetry embodies great Shaivite cosmology and metaphysics, but makes it accessible to all common people. This in itself breaks with the exclusivity of the Brahmin tradition. Furthermore, Lalla left the bounds of her home life, as was designated for women during her time, and broke custom that her contemporary Brahmins did not condoned.

As mentioned earlier, a number of hagiological works describe a close association between the Sufi Master Nooruddin and Lal Ded. According to H. N. Rafiabadi, this intimate spiritual relation between Lalla and Sheikh Nund Rishi has been explicitly discussed in folklore traditions, as well as in hagiographical documents.<sup>142</sup> M. Ishaq Khan also highlights this relationship. He writes that a great deal of modern writers have gone to extents to emphasize interpolations in both Lalla and Nooruddin's mystical poetry, but they failed to grasp the similarity of the context in which these verses were produced.<sup>143</sup> N. K. Kotru writes that

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>143</sup> Khan, 2005, 78.

the Sheikh Nooruddin was a much younger contemporary of Lalla.<sup>144</sup> He writes that both of them preached against doctrinal rituals like animal sacrifice, fasting, pilgrimage, and other ritualistic forms of religion, while stressing moderation in food and drink. These two had the concept of self-restraint at the crux of their inner quest. When reading texts of Nund Rishi, while this is true to some degree the concept of Divine Law is not entirely dismissed. Lalla did write that self-torture cannot be attained by self-torture, ascetic practices or renunciation of household life.<sup>145</sup> She also wrote overeating will lead us into ignorance, while not eating will give rise to conceit. “A true seeker is he who follows the gurus [religious teachers] word with honest faith and constantly meditate on the Shiva [one God] with single minded devotion.”<sup>146</sup> For Kortu, they both preached about oneness of God, universal brotherhood, and a chaste life<sup>147</sup>—principles found as the basis of both Hindu Shaivism and Islam. Kotru emphasizes that this period “strengthened the bonds of love and brotherhood between follower of two religions.”<sup>148</sup> This was a harmonizing time between the two religions during a time of deep-seated conflict. Kotru makes drastically opposing remarks. While he shuns Islam in Kashmir, he also attributes it with the harmonizing effect. Such confusion are a byproduct of the current socio-political turmoil of Kashmir and not an accurate historical record of Lalla’s time. Regardless, Kotru and Muslim

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Kotru, xix.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, iv.

scholars like Rafiabadi do agree that for Lalla, it was the Lord's grace that can ensure success and that self-realization for her was to die while still alive.<sup>149</sup>

Lalla's sayings are not a deliberate contribution to literature. The *vaakhs* are spontaneous outpourings of her heart heard by different people in fragments as they fell from her lips on different occasions, and carried down from generation to generation by word of mouth.<sup>150</sup> However, we must remember that Lalla did not intentionally create a piece of literature, organized as it is presented today.<sup>151</sup> In fact, her works were not consolidated in a single manuscript, and its recent consolidation has been largely attributed to Jai Lal Kaul by contemporary thinkers, including Nil Kanth Kotru.

Lalla's idea of the Supreme, according to Temple, was a "lofty one".<sup>152</sup> She continually taught that the entire universe was in comparison with the One God—an idea that fits comfortably into both Shaivite and Sufi thought. She is further a Yogini, a professed female ascetic who wanders about spreading the yogic doctrines wherever she goes<sup>153</sup>—a trait not unique to most Sufis of her time. The yogis of her time communicate knowledge of the Divine only with those who were initiated and prepared to receive such knowledge, and Lalla looked for no such thing. However, her teachers make continuous references to Yogic doctrine, filled with technicalities and terms from Shaivite tradition. According to R. C. Temple, it was hard for the European Christian West to accept Lalla as wholly Hindu or Indian because she had strong ideas of monism and perhaps

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, i.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, i-ii.

<sup>152</sup> Richard, 166.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

even monotheism.<sup>154</sup> These ideas did not find their way into her works through Christian thought, as there was very little contact with Christianity with that region, however such idea of the One God came from her contact Islam and with the basis of Shaivism in Kashmir, which is a monotheistic religion. It matters not for Lalla by what name the Supreme is called, He is still the Supreme; be all things to all men, taught in terms that have sunk into people; the true saint is the servant of all mankind through his humility and loving-kindness.<sup>155</sup> To Lalla matters not what a man is or what his work of gaining his livelihood may be, as long as he seeks the Supreme.

There are numerous themes in the *vaakhs* that are explicitly Islamic in nature, Lalla's talk of resurrection day is one such example. R. C. Temple describes that Lalla sees this as an hour that will come when men are not looking for it.<sup>156</sup> Lalla wants mankind to be ready for death when it calls. Temple also notes that Lalla fills her teachings with universal ideas that most religions can agree with.<sup>157</sup> Lalla incorporates Hindu doctrine with Muslim doctrine through which Christian doctrine also finds its way into her work. However, at the same time Temple also attempts to limit Lalla to just the Shaivite Advaita doctrine.<sup>158</sup> However, Lalla's *vaakhs* suggest a degree of religious universality. Therefore, just like it cannot be confirmed that Lalla was a Muslim, it cannot really be confirmed that she was a Shaivite either. It can be assumed that she was trained in the Shaivite tradition, and came close contact with Muslims Sufis. Anyone who

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 169.



reads her saying cannot deny that she came in contact with both religions and employed their cosmology, philosophies, and language into her own—yet her outward religious association is irrelevant in her *Vakh-yani*.

### *Lalla and Sufism*

Mysticism only preserves the earliest religious doctrine and ritual, but also provides the ideal platform for comparative religion. Mysticism is prevalent in almost every religion, flowing within the veins of the internal, esoteric aspect of each tradition. It is not necessarily compatible with the conventional dogma of the larger world religions, but nor is it entirely divorced from them. Lalla is the female-mystic saint of Kashmir, who unintentionally provides a literary genius, which embodies the mysticism of both Kashmiri Shaivism and Sufism.

Sufism is often viewed as an autonomous territory of esoteric religious experience in Islam, however it is not divorced from exoteric Divine law. The practices of the Sufis are beyond the conventional understanding of exoteric, dogmatic religion, but they are not without the basic tenants of Islam. The Sufi leaves behind the “sober”, mechanical experience of religion for a transcendent comprehension of oneness.<sup>159</sup>

There are two models that explain mystical experience.<sup>160</sup> One model proposes that all mystical experience is a fundamental reflection of the same Ultimate Reality, beyond the mystic’s socio-religious disposition. While the other

---

<sup>159</sup> Katz, Steven T. “Editorial Introduction”. *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

argues, it is a fundamental error to juxtapose the mystic's image onto another mystic from a different tradition. This theory contends that one mystic's experience cannot be adequately compared to another's as though they are entirely equivalent, because it disregards the importance of each distinct religious experience. However, the reality of mysticism exists delicately within the two extremes. Each mystic speaks and writes of one Reality, however the method and manner in which he or she communicates is limited to the context of his or her respective tradition, which cannot be overlooked. Lalla however falls into the first model, but goes beyond its bounds. She not only attempted to explain her experience similarly to the Sufis, her *vaakhs* suggest that she experienced the same ultimate reality through two outwardly different spiritual paths.

While a mystic practices the exoteric and esoteric components of his or her respective religion, the goal of a mystic by definition is to surpass the identity of religion, gender, race, and so on. There is simply "no-self"—the universal goal of mysticism. This become thoroughly evident in the Lalla's *vaakhs*, in which she teaches to die in this lifetime and to abandon the lower *tattavas*. The realization of selflessness leads the mystic to the perfected state, often described metaphysically as the Ultimate Truth, the Absolute Reality, the Godhead, or various others. This state transcends beyond the limitations of history, space, and time. It is characteristic of a mystic to experience the 'sameness' with the Absolute, which may be called Krishna, Dao, God, Allah and or a variety of other names.

The problem for a mystic arises, when he or she returns to the corporeal

world from the imaginal<sup>161</sup>, angelic, or divine realm. Once again, the mystic is caught in tradition, history, time, and space. This proves difficult for the mystic, who attempts to express the non-corporeal experience in the context of the material world. Therefore, to express that which becomes inexpressible in such circumstances, the mystic relies heavily upon the use of symbols<sup>162</sup> and syntax of his or her religious community. It is from here the differences originate in the symbolism and scriptural metaphors used to describe mystical experience. The images used by each mystic are unique to the individual's religious tradition. However, the message and goal remain the same: to describe aspects of the same Absolute Reality. Lalla relies heavily on both Shaivite and Sufi symbols to communicate her experience, as a result she creates rare jewels that become sacred to the Kashmiri people. Lalla unintentionally provides a literary genius, which embodies the soul of both Kashmiri Hinduism and Islam simultaneously. The arguments for being specifically one over the other are difficult to confirm one way or another.

The origin of Sufism, known as *tassawuf* in Arabic, varies in opinions of scholars; some argue that its beginnings lay outside of Islam. However such theories often do not recognize that Islamic Divine Law or *Shar'iah* is the corner stone of the esoteric Sufi way called *tariqa*. Furthermore, most Sufi orders trace their spiritual lineage to Ali ibn Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet of

---

<sup>161</sup> This is a realm of existence or an order of reality, between the corporeal and angelic orders. It exists outside of physical time and space. From the oriental perspective, the traditional civilizations were too aware of the Divine Origin of the world as well as the ontological dependence of material creation upon these higher orders of reality here and now. (Nasr, (1984): 524.)

<sup>162</sup> Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. New York: Digireads.Com, 2005, 101.

Islam. Therefore the doctrine and tradition of Islam is deeply embedded within Sufism, and the two cannot be divorced from each other. The Arabic word *tariqa*, or the narrow path, came to mean a “formal Sufi order”. The goal of a Sufi is self-annihilation, or what is called *fana’* in Arabic. Louis Massignon, a French scholar of Islam and its history, argues that Islamic mysticism is based upon the meditation of the Quran and imitation of the actions of the Messenger of God.<sup>163</sup> Many mystics ponder the meaning of each single verse in the Quran, which they believe can lead to a deeper understanding of the 7,000 interpretations of each verse.<sup>164</sup> As a result, the Quranic vocabulary has colored expressions of Persian and Turkish Sufi poetry. The Persian language served as one of Sufism’s earliest cradles.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, Persian Sufism has cultivated a uniqueness that has far-reaching influence upon intellectuals and literature related to mystical experience throughout the Muslim world.

Sufi’s began by accepting that there is only one God, the basic tenet of the Islamic faith, known as the *shahada*.<sup>166</sup> Early mystics developed systems to control their carnal souls or *nafs*, to transfer the basic human instinct towards the goal of Divine realization. Sufis also rediscovered the world, as remnants of God’s creative power. They understood that everything was created by God, and deserved its own praise in its own language, in silence or sound. Various Sufis also concentrated on the concept of Divine love, which often reverted to

---

<sup>163</sup> Massignon, Louis. *Essai Sur Les Origines Du Lexique Technique De La Mystique Musulmane*. Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1922.

<sup>164</sup> Katz, 130.

<sup>165</sup> Zarrinkoob, Abdol-Hosein. "Persian Sufism in Its Historical Perspective." *Iranian Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1997), 139.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

poetry.<sup>167</sup> Sufi worship surrounded the concept of remembrance or *dhikr*, of God through His revelation and His many names.

From 1200s to the 1500s, within the Muslim world occurred an evolution of “cultural renaissance”. This period defined the “expression of man’s belief in direct connection with the Godhead”<sup>168</sup>. In Persian Sufism, this was derived from the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian ethical ideas, which defined every particular aspect of daily life and man’s role in the battle of Good and Evil--an “unconscious expression of a pantheistic type of mysticism”<sup>169</sup>.

These orders were formed in the mid-twelfth century, and played a large role in bringing teachings of Islam to remote places.<sup>170</sup> The first and foremost role of Sufi orders was to maintain ideal, social ethics for communities, which did not promote monastic lifestyle. Sufis were responsible for the conversion of various areas of the world to Islam on a grand scale, especially the Subcontinent and South East Asian Islands. Sufi words and ideas matriculated down to lullabies and folk songs in vernacular languages in these regions, which promoted local religious practice and fervor. Along with conversion of others to Islam, Sufi orders also attempted to reform themselves. Many formed theosophical organizations, in which they developed Sufi philosophies that defined man and the cosmos. Although Sufi orders are not of one homogenous type, their goals always lay in the direct relationship and knowledge of the transcendent God.

As discusses earlier, Islam came into contact with Kashmir through Sufism.

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 138

These ideas found themselves in Kashmir with the arrival of Sayyid Ali Hamadani. N. K. Kotru writes about Sayyid Ali Hamadani as a refugee who escaped at the hands of Timur of central Asia, and came to Kashmir. Hamadani is recorded as being responsible for the conversion of nearly 37000 Kashmiris to Islam. Kotru defines this process as an aggressive and vigorous process.<sup>171</sup> However, documentations of Hamdani's life by M. Ishaq Khan and H. N. Rafiabadi describe Sheikh Hamadani as a peaceful Sufi master. It is questionable that the documented 700 disciples of Hamadani could have forcefully converted 37,000 Hindus. Furthermore, it is also Kotru who attributes the fact that while Hamadani converted so many he encouraged them to maintain their local, Hindu traditions like dress and social customs. Later Kotru attributes Mir Mohammad Hamadani with campaigning vigorous proselytizations and harassment of Hindus.<sup>172</sup> While Kotru notes that Sufism and Shaivism found each other to be similar and non-threatening, he also writes that "Islam could not strike deep root in the early years despite conversion of large number of people nor wipe away old mystical and religious traditions or beliefs, which has been inherited from the past".<sup>173</sup> Such drastically different arguments of historical record prove a lack of objectivity in Kotru's perception of Islam in Kashmir.

However, it is not Kotru who appears to have an issue with the Sufis entering Kashmir, rather S. S. Toshkhani attributes lack of authenticity to Sufi

---

<sup>171</sup> Kotru, iv.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, iv.

and Persian hagiographers.<sup>174</sup> According to him, it has become difficult to authenticate the real Lalla because her real sources have been immensely complicated by the intervention of nearly seven hundred years of history. This has created images and fabrications, and not products of “genuine scholarship”. For Toshkhani, the most formidable attempt to appropriate Lal Ded is from those who want to “snatch her for Islam”.<sup>175</sup> However this is the very philosophy that Lalla’s *vaakhs* attempt to escape. She neither identifies herself as a Hindu or a Muslim. Nor does she pay attention to sacred texts or other outward rituals of either tradition. Therefore, to argue that Kashmiri Sufis attempted to snatch her for themselves is as accurate as the contemporary scholars like Toshkhani who exclusively attempt to snatch her for Hinduism.

For S. S. Toshkhani, the battle for Lalla’s religious identity is the battle for Kashmir itself. He says, “they [the Muslims] want someone as great as Lalleshwari”.<sup>176</sup> Lalla is a great symbol of Kashmir, who stands for everything Kashmiri. He writes that her sayings shaped the Kashmiri language and therefore shaped the Kashmiri indigenous cultural identity.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, to lose Lalla to Islam, is to lose the soul of Kashmir to Islam. Unfortunately, Lalla’s *vaakh* are not at all in line with contemporary political rifts between the two religions. Lalla attempts to consolidate the two religions, and attempts to make both realities available to all people, of all castes and religions. Toshkhani goes as far as attempting to prove that Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Lalla never met. He bases

---

<sup>174</sup> Toshkhani, Śaśisekhara. *Lal Ded: The Great Kashmiri Saint-Poetess*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2002, 40.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 40.

his arguments upon J. L. Kaul. He attributes this impossibility because Lalla was much too young when Hamadani entered Kashmir in 1372.<sup>178</sup> As stated earlier M. Ishaq Khan proves hagiographical record that explains otherwise. J. L. Kaul dismisses such proof as not accurate and subjective to a “Muslim agenda”. Furthermore, S. S. Toshkhani also notes that another hagiographer by the name of Peer Ghulam Hassan who does not mention the meeting between Hamadani and Lalla in his records.<sup>179</sup> The lack of scholarly evidence may not prove that Lalla existed at the same time as Hamadani, however it also does not prove that she existed at a different time period either. Her *vaakhs* embody Sufi language, and her interaction with Sufis was inevitable. Toshkhani is afraid of “people who want to create a non-Hindu image of Lalla”.<sup>180</sup> However, such fears destroy the essential universality of Lalla’s message.

To question the legends of Lalla’s meeting with Sayyid Ali Hamadani is not enough to divorce her from Islam entirely. At the same time, her association with Sufi Islam is not enough to dismiss her Shaivite background or prove her conversion to Islam. The majority of these arguments and debates are regressive when attempting to understand Lalla’s *vaakhs*. The story of her meeting with Hamadani cannot be reduced to a “hegemonistic design to establish the superiority of Islam over the creed of the ‘infidels’”.<sup>181</sup> Rather these legends explain the contents of Lalla’s *vaakh*, regardless of if they actually occurred or are imaginative legend. Their existence does not equal the victory of one

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 43.



religion over another in Kashmir. Toshkhani called Richard Carnac Temple “a confused man”, who referred to Lalla as a Hindu Shaivite and then claims that she was absorbed in the Sufi line of thought of her contemporary and friend Sayyid Hamadani.<sup>182</sup> However, why this appears as a contradiction to Toshkhani is an enigma. His severely limited scholarship refuses to accept the similarities between Shaivite religion and Sufism. He also attempts to disregard that Islam could have in any way influenced Lalla. Such scholarship is not objective and is the by-product of the current religious conflict of the region. On the same note the argument that Lalla converted the masses Islam is also far-fetched. While Lalla did preach monotheism, she did not explicitly preach Islam or Shaivism, but at the same time her ontological teachings are not in conflict with either tradition.<sup>183</sup> This is the miracle of Lalla’s sayings.

According to M. Ishaq Khan, Lalla’s verses have profound impact in Kashmiri society, as is illustrated by her contemporaries Nuruddin and other hagiographical eulogies to her.<sup>184</sup> Some of Lalla’s greatest eulogists have been Muslims hagiographers.<sup>185</sup> Just by the sheer fact that Persian hagiographers over Brahmin chronicles attempted to document Lalla, one cannot dismiss Lalla’s close relationship with Islam. Lalla’s teachings were translated into action by the locals, who were socially oppressed by Brahmin structure. Her sayings became significant for all Kashmiris, including the Muslims who found their roots in local culture. According to H. N. Rafiabadi, Lalla is best remembered for her crusades

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>183</sup> Khan, 2003, 349.

<sup>184</sup> Khan, 2005, 78.

<sup>185</sup> Khan, 2003, 349.

against Brahminical hegemony and the oppression of the so-called lower castes.<sup>186</sup> This does not mean that Lalla was not Shaivite, but it also does not mean that she was a Muslim. All it does clearly tell us is that, Lalla was not comfortable with the esoteric social structure of Hindu society. In her *vaakhs*, she addressed both religions and focuses on social equality and the oneness of God.

Lalla says,

Shiva abides in all that exists anywhere.  
Do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim.  
If you be wise recognize your true self;  
That is the true knowledge of God.<sup>187</sup>

If Lalla clearly states this, the arguments from both extreme seem frivolous and lack a great deal of scholarly objectivity. Lalla clearly writes to not discriminate between the two religions, but unfortunately her own works are used to do so.

Lalla does not side with any single religion, however Lalla does stand up against Brahminic supremacy, which is often interpreted as her “conversion to Islam”. According to Khan, this is often attributed to the fact that a great deal of Kashmiri Hindus converted to Islam to liberate themselves of Brahminic hegemony against whom Lalla stood up.<sup>188</sup> There is no proof that Lalla offered Islam as an alternative to Brahminic tradition. She was considered a renegade by the high-caste of Brahmins, and perhaps for that reason was dismissed as having changed camps to Islam.<sup>189</sup> But there is no proof or documentation of this conversion, only inferences and implications based on her views about Brahmin society. Lalla did not preach Islam in her *vaakhs*. While Sayyid Ali Hamadani

---

<sup>186</sup> Rafiabadi, 135.

<sup>187</sup> Vaakh 57.

<sup>188</sup> Khan, 2005, 73.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

works dealt more exclusively with mysticism properly written in language intended for other Sufis, Lalla propagated the mystic idea of divine unity in simple language that was deep and direct to appeal to the common man.<sup>190</sup> For Lalla, the true devotee was not concerned with ritual, but practice of seeing God within oneself and in the routine of everyday life.

Institutional indoctrination is something Lalla speaks up against. She speaks against all ritual she thinks are frivolous. Such is apparent in the following *vaakh* when she dismisses the significance of idols and temples. She says,

The idol is but stone, so is the temple  
From top to bottom is one mass.<sup>191</sup>

Lalla's contemporary Shaikh Nuruddin also wrote about her spiritual precept.

Sheikh Nur al-Din accepted her as a spiritual preceptor. He writes,

That Lalla of Padmanpore  
Who had drunk the fill of divine nectar,  
She was undoubtedly an avatar of ours.  
O God, grant me the same spiritual powers.<sup>192</sup>

Regardless of what this might suggest about her status in Islam, it does testify to her high spiritual state. It also demonstrates how highly she was revered by other figures, who now are referred to as Saints and sages of the region.

While Lalla's sayings do not give explicit proof of her conversion to Islam, there is evidence from later sources regarding her close association with Sufi master Saiyid Husain Simani.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, Lalla did not live in a historical vacuum isolated from people of different faith than herself. She was well aware of castes and religious differences, and she spoke up against them.

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>191</sup> Vaakh 66.

<sup>192</sup> Saqi, M. L.. Kuliyyat-i-Sheikh-UI-Alam. Delhi: NA, 1985, 10

<sup>193</sup> Khan, 2003, 350.

This battle between scholars arguing for Lalla's association between one religion over another does not seem to recognize that Lalla is no believer in good works in this or former lives, in pilgrimages or authorities, in ritual ascetic practices, in ritual or any other works done for profit spiritual or otherwise, or in formal worship.<sup>194</sup> According to Temple, Lalla's only concern is with the Supreme and is also a firm believer in the transmigration of souls, when she claims to have recollection of events from former lives.<sup>195</sup> S. S. Toshkhani identified that Lalla had mystical insights and spiritual vision, her profound awareness have her insights to the human condition and her Shiva (or God oriented) worldview.<sup>196</sup> However, like R. C. Temple and C. Barks, Toshkhani does note the simplicity with which Lalla expresses her message so that it can be read by all of mankind, Hindu or Muslim.

---

<sup>194</sup> Temple, 165.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>196</sup> Toshkhani,40.

## Chapter 4

### History and Work

#### *The Life of Lalla*

As noted earlier, Kashmir served as both an intellectual and spiritual center for some time. Buddhism flourished in the region long before the rise and fall of Vedanta philosophy. Various forms of Shaivism were later to come, but their impact is great on the Hindu population of the region. Islam flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during the life of Lalla. The earliest recorded mention of Lalla is by a Persian named Baba Mishkai in his *Asrar-ul-Abrar*, or the Secret of the Pious, which is hagiographical document.<sup>197</sup> Her contemporary Sanskrit chronicles do not mention Lal Ded whatsoever.<sup>198</sup> According to compilation of different documentation, Lalla was born in Sempor or Pandrenthan.<sup>199</sup> Legends say that she was born to a Brahmin family, in which she received education in religious rites and language. According to Kaul, the date of her birth is debated to be between 1217 and 1320 CE. She is believed to have lived to a fairly old age.<sup>200</sup> C. Barks who has done translations of Lalla's sayings in his book *Naked Song*, estimates that she was born in 1320 CE, and died near 1391 CE.<sup>201</sup> According to Kaul, Lalla passed away between the years of 1388 CE to 1391 CE.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> Kaul,2.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Roberts, 32.

<sup>200</sup> Barks, Coleman. *Naked song* . Athens, Ga.: Maypop Books, 1992, 9.

<sup>201</sup> Barks,9.

<sup>202</sup> Kaul, 7.

Barks notes, Lalla lived in Kashmir during the 14<sup>th</sup> century when various doctrinal religious streams were merging.<sup>203</sup> This included Shaivism, Sufism, Vedantic non-dualism, and number of other –isms.<sup>204</sup> However, Lalla was beyond any of these religious categories, a living combination that cannot be limited to terms of religious identity. Michelle Voss Roberts writes of Lalla exclusively as a Shaivite saint. She describes Lalla’s identity as a “prophetess” or as a seer, who descended upon this earth with a divine message for mankind.<sup>205</sup> These monikers highlighted various aspects of her thought, from what she called “prophetic reform” through critique of her own society to “purposed mysticism.”<sup>206</sup> Most of these identities of Lalla, are bestowed upon her, and not something she herself spoke about.

However, at the same time Barks explains there are yogic references, Shaivite and Sufi terminology in her *vaakhs*. Her deepest, most constant truth is what she shares with all great mystics of various religions, that “There is no reality but God.” In Islam, this is the testimony or *shahadah* that initiates the conversion to the religion. For Lalla, there is within and without, “only God.”<sup>207</sup> Lalla saw no difference between the individual self, and the universal self. The purpose of human life, according to her sayings, was to realize this very thing. For her the names of various elements including soul, God, enlightenment were of little significance.<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, she has little use for scriptures<sup>209</sup>, which

---

<sup>203</sup> Barks, 7.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Roberts, 35.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

places her in an interesting place with both Shaivism and Sufism which take religious text and ritual as very important. Bark sums up the religious philosophy of Lalla, when he says that her most penetrating vision is when she wrote “nothing pouring into nothing”.<sup>210</sup>

She had thrown all conventional respectability to the winds and roamed careless of dress and decorum. She did not observe the formalities of ceremonial piety, and she was vehemently critical of orthodoxy, its dogma, ritual, hypocrisy and exclusiveness.<sup>211</sup> Lalla spoke of the secret doctrine and its disciplines, and disregarded the strict injunctions on behalf of unlettered masses.<sup>212</sup> Supposedly, she was married very young, and lived in her husband’s home for 12 years.<sup>213</sup> She was abused by her husband’s indifference and her mother-in-law invented ingenious means of cruel treatment.<sup>214</sup> After having suffered for a long time at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law, she left home for good.<sup>215</sup>

Kaul’s research also talks about the miraculous nature of Lalla.<sup>216</sup> There are stories of miracles attached to her life before her spiritual realizations. During the time of her marriage, she was mistreated by her mother-in-law. According to M. V. Roberts, in her *Nurnama* (early hagiographical account of her life) legends has it that her mother in law would give her a stone covered in rice for dinner each day to make it look as if she was getting more food than she actually

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>211</sup> Kaul, 3.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 2.

was.<sup>217</sup> Lalla, with her never-ending patience, never complained. According to another hagiographical account *Asrar-ul-Abrar*, Lalla renounced her married life after a famous incident where her husband questioned her fidelity.<sup>218</sup> Barks writes that Lalla liked spending great amounts of time meditating at holy shrines, where she would stop when she would go fetch water. One day, her husband questioned her fidelity and struck the jar she was carrying. The story has it that the jar broke, but the water remained intact as a jar-shaped column on her head. This location then became the sacred lake known as Lalla's Pond or "Lalla Trag" in Kashmir.<sup>219</sup> This is supposedly when Lalla left the home of her in-laws, and a worldly life. She became a wanderer. According to some legends, she wandered and danced in a semi-nude state, unconcerned with outward appearance.<sup>220</sup>

There is much mystery and legend surrounding this renowned woman, however she existed and lived in the fourteenth century.<sup>221</sup> According to H. N. Rafiabadi Lalla was born in a city named Sempura, which is a 6-mile distance from Sringar to a Brahmin family, and was married into a family 2 miles away in Pampore.<sup>222</sup> Also, according to Barks, Lalla left home at about the age of 24, when she became a student of teacher Seb Bayu. It was at that point she began to ignore conventional standards of dress and wandered in a state of ecstatic clarity.<sup>223</sup> Further, there are parables and legends that associate her to Sufis, generally through accidental meetings that developed into teacher-student

---

<sup>217</sup> Roberts, 32-33.

<sup>218</sup> Kaul, 2.

<sup>219</sup> Roberts, 33.

<sup>220</sup> Roberts, 33.

<sup>221</sup> Kaul, 1.

<sup>222</sup> Rafiabadi, 133.

<sup>223</sup> Barks, 9.



relationship. One such interaction is between Lalla and Hamadani. The story goes that she encountered Hamadani in an estatic state in which she was wandering naked. Upon seeing him, she ran into a baker's shop and jumped into the oven. Suddenly she reappeared out of the oven wearing the shimmering green and gold of Paradise.<sup>224</sup> Barks writes, that she said "I had never seen a man until you."<sup>225</sup>

Many legends describe Lalla in a state of nudity. Several of Lalla's *vaakhs* have been translated to support such legends. These *vaakhs* describe her semi-nude condition. According to M. Ishaq Khan, these verses have been read and interpreted out of social context.<sup>226</sup> Rather, he suggests that this reference is a sense of revolt by iniquitous social order, above all her spiritual preceptor Sayyid Husain Simani. Furthermore, the story of wandering nudity is attributed to various different female saints of South Asia.<sup>227</sup> However, scholars like J. L. Kaul do note that this may be a misunderstanding of her *vaakhs* that speaks about her naked dancing.<sup>228</sup> Instead of wandering naked, Kaul suggest that Lalla was rather roaming aimless, naked or not—we cannot confirm.<sup>229</sup> But we can be certain that Lalla did not care about how her exterior looked, so she would not care for clothing just as much as she would not care to be naked. Kaul also writes about a story of the interaction between Lalla and her father in law, who found her roaming nude. Apparently, he let her into his house to put on clothes,

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>226</sup> Khan, 2005, 75.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 2005, 75.

<sup>228</sup> Kaul, 12.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

however she protested that there were no human beings around, only goats and sheep, and asked him to look out from the window. All her saw were sheep and goats.<sup>230</sup> This however does not serve as proof of her tendency to wander nude, but rather testifies for how little need she has for prescribed rituals and ceremonies of her society and religion.

According to Sir George Abraham Grierson, a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Irish scholar of India, Lalla was a contemporary of Hamadani.<sup>231</sup> He also wrote that she was a Yogini, who had great influence in converting Kashmir to Islam—an argument with which J. L. Kaul, N. K. Kotru, and S. S. Toshkhani do not agree.<sup>232</sup> Hamadani arrived in 1380 CE, and remained there for six years during reign of Qutb ud-Din, something that is reflected in Lalla's sayings.<sup>233</sup> She was a follower of Kashmiri branch of the Shaivite religion, but was no bigot. To her all religions were equal in their essential elements.<sup>234</sup> This can be seen by the amount of respect all Muslims of the region give Lalla. Richard Carnac Temple's research has also linked her to various religious traditions due to her *vaakhs*.

Lalla's songs were originally handed down by word of mouth.<sup>235</sup> They were placed in writing and canonized centuries after her death by Persian Hagiographers. According to Grierson, in the course of centuries the colloquial language of Kashmir has changed, and therefore the language in which Lalla

---

<sup>230</sup> Kaul, 15.

<sup>231</sup> Grierson, Sir George, and Lionel D. Barnett. *Lallā-Vākhyāni: The Wise Sayings of Lal Dēd, a Mystic Poetess of Ancient Kashmīr*. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1920, B.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

originally spoke and the writings we find today may not be the same.<sup>236</sup> We cannot therefore be surprised to find verses that are on a whole in the Kashmiri spoken at present day. However, this theory suggests that Lalla may not have created but only set a precursor for modern Kashmiri. According to Roberts, “Lalla has been called the maker of modern Kashmiri language as well as literature”<sup>237</sup> Therefore, the depending on how this theory is approached, Lalla’s status in Kashmiri society can either be heightened or undermined by the alleged evolution of the Kashmiri language. Nonetheless, Lalla’s contemporaries, including Sheikh Noouddin Nurani, revere her as a woman of greatness, who instigated a lot of social changes.

Lalla took up several spiritual teachers on her wanderings. According to R. C. Temple, she grew into the habit of wandering about in semi-nude or even nude states, dancing and singing in ecstasy.<sup>238</sup> She spouted forth words which served as the mouthpieces of the ideas of her teachers and contemporaries. She is believed to have studied under both Guru Sidh Boy and Sheikh Hamadani. It is after her encounter with Hamadani, that she finally hid behind a furnace and then reappeared with clothing because for the first time, she saw “a true man [of God]”.<sup>239</sup> She is reported to have several meetings with him, but this is highly under debate and will be explored later.

She is believed to have met and served as a spiritual teacher to Sheikh Nooruddin Nurani of Chrar, where she impressed him through her spiritual

---

<sup>236</sup> Grierson, viii.

<sup>237</sup> Roberts, 32.

<sup>238</sup> Temple, 1.

<sup>239</sup> Rafiabadi, 133.

acumen.<sup>240</sup> It is during this time, her conversion to Islam may have taken place. There are a number of arguments for and against her conversion to Islam, however it cannot be denied that she attempted to establish strict monotheism in the Shaivism of Sidhaboy or Sidha Shrikant.<sup>241</sup> She beckoned him to rid of idol worship and took him to the company of Hamadani. Rafiabadi writes that after these meetings Sidha Shrikant became a seeker of the wisdom Hamadani preached, who at that time he was only 20 years old.<sup>242</sup>

Her life etched great marks into the history, language, and culture of Kashmir. Her *Lalla-Vakayni*, also known simply as *Vaakhs*, meaning Lalla's wise sayings served as a mark of unique contribution to the language of Kashmir.<sup>243</sup> It is unbelievable how her works took hold of the people of a country. The sayings of a supposed wandering ascetic madwoman became essential integral to most Kashmiri households. Her poetry embodies the language of Shaivism and Islam, and intertwines the possibility of coexistence for both in a region that has seen much turmoil.

Kashmir remembers the verses of Lalla frequently and in many different fields and occasions. Her *vaakhs* are not just utterances of a saint or holy woman, according to Temple, they are grand spiritual thoughts and laws that are short, sweet, thrilling, life giving, pregnant with the great moral principles,

---

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Temple, viv.

veritable pearls, diamonds, and “gems of purest ray serene” of Kashmiri Literature.<sup>244</sup>

Although Richard Temple writes about Lal Ded as a follower of the Shiva religion, her metaphors and representations come from images of both Shaivism and Islam. Kotru writes that she underwent tutelage from her guru-disciple relationship with her Shaivite guru, who she asked about the nature of the Absolute.<sup>245</sup> He talks about her direct lineage from its founder with her guru Siddha Srikantha.<sup>246</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan and Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi disagree, and argue that she was a Muslim who happened to be using the local Shaivite languages to communicate messages of Sufism.<sup>247</sup> Although she was born into a Brahmin family, she is spoken about extensively as a Muslim. According to Khan, she was undoubtedly exposed to Islamic influences centuries before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate. As her *vaakhs* attest, Lalla did not have a closed mind, that she was capable of shutting her eyes to the presence of her contemporaries like Sayyid Husain Simnani, Sayyid Tajuddin and Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani.<sup>248</sup> She is also placed among renowned Muslims and scholars and mystics.<sup>249</sup> Her work promotes inter-religious, interpersonal, and inter-communal dialogue. Rafiabadi concludes that although her faith is debated and heavily fought over for socio-religious reasons, she made an impact on all Kashmiris, whether Muslim or Hindu, rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Her

---

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Vaakh 24.

<sup>246</sup> Kotru, x-xi.

<sup>247</sup> Khan, 2005, 73.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 135.

sayings deeply flowed through the minds of one and all.<sup>250</sup> The *vaakhs* address both Hindus as well as Muslim, and talk about social equality and oneness of God.<sup>251</sup>

### *The Vaakhs*

Lalla does not preach any creed or dogma, or propound a philosophy in the scholarly sense of the term. According to Roberts, she taught from the depths of her own mystic experiences; and when one speaks from the fullness of the heart, life-giving power is imparted to the words and they are carried on the wings of time through the ages.<sup>252</sup> Lalla's *vaakhs* are a means for her to express her thought and spiritual experiences. As noted in earlier sections, Lalla did not intend to create a canon of literature that would become the cornerstone of the Kashmiri language. She transmitted most of her saying orally, which were later written down by Persian hagiographers.

Lalla's *sayings* are most diligently translated to English by J. L. and N. K. Kotru. It is their translations I employed for the purposes of this research. The *vaakhs* were organized and numbered as they are today, by contemporary Indian scholars like Kaul. Although, the general idea about Lalla's identity may be very specific and different, the translation is true to the Kashmiri. It is crucial to learn from her Kashmiri interpreters. Lalla's verses have only the scantest allusion to

---

<sup>250</sup> Rafiabadi, 133.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>252</sup> Roberts, 31.

her personal history.<sup>253</sup> Unfortunately, as discussed in earlier sections, there is no singular source that contains her entire biography. Rather, the stories are pieced together from various Persian hagiographical models and the works of contemporary India scholars of Kashmiri religion.

Because of the nature in which Lalla's *vaakhs* have come to be canonized it is difficult to authenticate them. According to Roberts, they were passed along orally for centuries. If that was not complicated enough, various scholars including N. K. Kotru and J. L. Kaul write about the possibility of mixing her verses with those of other poets such as Noorudin Nurani.<sup>254</sup> On the other hand H. N. Rafiabadi writes that there is beauty in the overlap between the works of Lalla and her contemporaries. He writes, that according to Muslim hagiographer Ali Jawad Zaidi Shati Kanth, there are similar views between Lalla and Noorudin in regards to religion and ethics—they both wanted to remove the difference of duality.<sup>255</sup> At the same time, there are differences between the two despite their stark similarities and so one's verse cannot be simple exchanged with another.

Furthermore, since the time of Lalla the language of Kashmir has evolved and modernized, borrowing words from Persian and Arabic. Often this fact is used to separate Lalla from the possibility of having interacted with Islam. Therefore, when her *vaakhs* incorporate Persian vocabulary, Kaul argues that this is a modern insertion into her works.<sup>256</sup> But such arguments are difficult to prove. The reality of Kashmiri has included influences from Persian and Arabic

---

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>255</sup> Rafiabadi, 138.

<sup>256</sup> Kaul, 36.

since the before the life of Lalla. Indian scholars like S. S. Toshkhani recommend that text and context should be taken into consideration when attempting to grappled with Lalla's verses.<sup>257</sup> Lalla's *vaakhs* may indeed be an organic entity that have continually adapted to the spiritual and religious scene of the Kashmiri landscape. For the purposes of this research, I will use the N. K. Kotru's translation. Also, I have attempted to employ research from Lalla's contemporaries, and from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars who have conducted in depth research on Lalla life and work.

Although the form of Kashmir is often debated, all scholars agree Lalla's language is simple and written for all to read and comprehend. Lalla does set up a basic organization to all her *vaakhs*. In the first or last line she sets up the theme, and the vivid illusions follow and build on this theme.<sup>258</sup> In her sayings she attempts to deal with the idea of duality and the desire for union with God—concepts found in both the Shaivite and Sufi traditions. Lalla comes to recognize dynamic interaction between the perception of difference. She says,

Now I saw a river flowing,  
Now neither a bridge nor a ferry.  
Now I saw a plant in full bloom,  
now neither a flower nor a thron to be seen.<sup>259</sup>

This verse can perhaps be best explained as Roberts describes it “when duality overwhelms her sense of God, she imagines life as a river or ocean to cross to

---

<sup>257</sup> Toshkhani, 60.

<sup>258</sup> Roberts, 51.

<sup>259</sup> Vaakh 10.



reach God on the other shore”.<sup>260</sup> Lalla attempts to find balance and realization of the *Parma Shiva*, or Ultimate Reality.

A number of Lalla’s *vaakhs* are interested in her realization of nothingness, which she speaks of as “merging into the void”. She speaks about it in various verses toward the end of her current canon. She says in one *vaakh*,

Think not that to kill green and to contemplate  
The self are difficult of attainment  
He is near you, seek not afar.  
The void gets merged into the void.<sup>261</sup>

In this and various other quatrains, she talks about aspects of the mind and body in relation to religious practices, and it all is followed by dissolution into nothingness.<sup>262</sup> Lalla wants to find the state of nothingness beyond not just the lower, but all *tattvas* of consciousness.

Lalla discusses the void in depth and attributes its realization to yogic practices. She wants the union with God to be attained through realization of the inevitably duality of the cosmos, this includes Shiva and Shakti, God and the World, and God and the *atman* (or the self)—all of which ultimately are nothingness. According to Roberts, Lalla says that it is through meditation that she realized God, and that the manifest world is merged with the unmanifested.<sup>263</sup>

Lalla’s *vaakhs* describe her moving from one level of the absolute to the next. She attempts to communicate the various levels of realization of the unity in duality—the realization of the Absolute. Lalla explains that process through what

---

<sup>260</sup> Roberts, 51.

<sup>261</sup> Vaakh 90.

<sup>262</sup> Roberts, 207.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 208.

gradual mental reversal of the process of manifestation occurs, as one meditates on the cause of each of the principles. According to Roberts, Lalla's sudden realization most likely occurred at the advanced stages of such practice "as when, for example, one breaks through the binding power of *maya* that identifies with the world of name and form".<sup>264</sup> Love, attraction, and union require two components, and for Lalla the two are the seeker and God. Such relationship is also described by other Sufis, including Hamadani and Nooruddin Nurani. Her *vaakhs* therefore inevitably embedded the basic philosophies and process to realization of Truth in a way that consolidates Shaivism and Persian Sufis that was found in Kashmir during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 212-213.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, Lalla lived during a period of great unrest and change in Kashmir. The spread of her philosophy that asked for social equality and freedom added to the ideological turmoil. As M. Ishaq Khan contended, it was due to Lalla's actions against the Brahminical hegemony that Hindu chroniclers left little record of her. On the other hand, a number of Persian hagiographers and eulogists captured the personality and life of Lalla in their texts. In Kashmir today both Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir claim her as their own. Her realizations are monotheistic, and she communicates them by using references to the vocabulary of Sanskrit *Trika* branch of Kashmiri Shaivism and Persian Sufism.

As this research suggests we cannot not prove if Lalla was a Hindu or a Muslim. Both sides provide arguments that are not based on Lalla's *vakh-yani*. Her works explain that religious identity was not of importance to Lalla. She had no interest in supporting or forming a new religious identity. Rather, she wanted to find truth in whichever form she encountered.

The need to associate with one religion over another contradicts her intentions. Lalla yearns only for union with God, and has little regard for dogma and religious rituals. She used the language of the region, and that's how she explained herself. It was just a means to relay the message, which was something entirely larger than religious identity.

Cultures that concentrate extensively on the study of Lalla, demonstrate that her literature liberated her from the life in her husband's house. She set out to search for her real home in the court of God. She studied with renowned gurus and Sufi Sheikhs. She is believed to have attained *avadhut*, or transcended body-consciousness, in Shaivism and *fana'*, or self-annihilation in God, in Sufism. The greater historical, religious, and socio-cultural framework of Kashmiri society gravely affected Lalla's mind and soul. It is these conditions her *vaakhs* address and attempt to allay.

Most importantly, I have examined Lalla through her own *vaakhs*, for nothing else describes her ideas and philosophy as her own work. Lalla can be understood as both as Hindu Shaivite and a Muslim Sufi, or she should be accepted as neither. Nowhere do her *vaakhs* confirm her preferences for one tradition. After exploring hagiographical data, there is no real proof of her abiding to the doctrine and ritual of any singular religion. Like the Shaivite, Lalla believes the "the perceptible is [God's] body".<sup>265</sup> She believes that the manifest body is the coming into being of a cosmic body of consciousness. This body attains gender in its manifest and non-manifest forms. "The tradition describes the essential cosmic body as the organs—the womb and the heart from which the physical universe emerges". In the same way Lalla is like Sufis, who believe in a dual relationship between the natures of God, which come together to create the perfection of creation. Also like both Shaivite and Sufi, she encourages a degree of ascetic practice. "One should neither starve nor obsessively feed the body".<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> Roberts, 193.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

However, unlike both traditions, she argues that excessive attention to external forms of worship is the same as the negative attention or excessive attention to the body. She says,

O embodied one,  
Should you be too much obsessed with your body,  
Embellishing it and adorning it and providing sweet dishes,  
of this body not even ashes will endure.<sup>267</sup>

Instead, Lalla focuses on the significance of the mind. She says that advance comprehension is needed to realize reality.<sup>268</sup> Knowledge or gnosis is the bridge of the mind. Roberts describes this relationship as a garden that one must cultivate and protected through everyday life.<sup>269</sup> It is within her own *vaakhs* that Lalla defines her “religious identity” and essence,

I stopped my breath in the bellows pipe;  
the lamp of knowledge shone bright for me,  
and revealed to me my true identity<sup>270</sup>

The identity mentioned in this message is that of a follower of God. Lalla sees life as a play, *Lila*, and simply rests her identity with Shiva as the Lord manifestation.<sup>271</sup>

As this paper has demonstrated, Lalla is attributed with having a number of different spiritual teachers who brought her to her spiritual acumen, this includes Sidha Shrikant, Hamadani, Samani, and others. She is remembered to this day because her works changed Kashmir in a profound way, leaving her marks in its history, language, and.

---

<sup>267</sup> Vaakh 31.

<sup>268</sup> Vaakh, 55.

<sup>269</sup> Roberts, 193.

<sup>270</sup> Vaakh 98.

<sup>271</sup> Roberts, 302.

In her sayings she grapples with the idea of duality and the desire for union with God—ideas that find themselves at home in both the Shaivite and Sufi traditions. Lalla comes to recognize difference in perception, but her poetry embodies the language of Hindu Shaivism and Persian Sufism suggesting the possibility of peaceful coexistence in Kashmir through common religious phenomena.

## References

- Barks, Coleman. *Naked song* . Athens, Ga.: Maypop Books, 1992.
- Barnett, Lionel David, and George Abraham Grierson. *Lalla-Vakyani, or the Wise Sayings of Lal Dēd, a Mystic Poetess of Ancient Kashmīr. Edited with Translation, Notes, and Vocabulary by Sir George Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett* . London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1920.
- Caldwell, Sarah. "The Heart of the Secret: A personal and Scholarly Encounter with Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 5, no. 1 (2001): 9-51.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2001.5.1.9> (accessed April 29, 2011).
- Chatterji, Jagadish Chandra. *Kashmir Shaivism* . Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986.
- Dimmitt, Cornelia, and JAB Buitenen. *Classical Hindu Mythology a Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.
- Doniger, Wendy. *Asceticism and eroticism in the mythology of Śiva* . London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Rig Veda: an anthology : one hundred and eight hymns, selected, translated and annotated.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Dyczkowski, Mark S. G.. *The doctrine of vibration: an analysis of the doctrines and practices of Kashmir Shaivism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Eaton, Richard M.. "Introduction." In *India's Islamic traditions, 711-1750* . New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003. 1-36.
- Engelsman, Joan Chamberlain. "Rediscovering the Feminine Principle." In *The Goddess re-awakening: the feminine principle today.* Compiled by Shirley J. Nicholson. Wheaton, Ill., U.S.A.: Theosophical Pub. House, 1989. 100-107.
- Flood, Gavin. *An introduction to Hinduism* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Grierson, Sir George, and Lionel D. Barnett. *Lallā-Vākhyāni: The Wise Sayings of Lal Dēd, a Mystic Poetess of Ancient Kashmīr.* London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1920.

- Jacobsen, Knut A. . "The Female Pole of the Godhead in Tantraism and the Prakriti of Samkhya." *Numen* 43, no. 1 (1996): 56-81.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3270236> . (accessed April 29, 2011).
- Johnston, Edward Hamilton. *Early Samkhya: an essay on its historical development according to the texts*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974.
- Hughes, John. *Self realization in Kashmir Shaivism: the oral teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo*. Albany (N.Y.): State university of New York press, 1995.
- Isaeva, N. V.. *From early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism Gaudapada, Bhartrhari, and Abhinavagupta*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Kaul, Jai Lal. *Lal Ded*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1973.
- Kaw, M. K.. *Kashmir and it's people: studies in the evolution of Kashmiri society*. New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp., 2004.
- Khan, Mohammad Ishaq. *Kashmir's transition to Islam: the role of Muslim rishis (15th-18th Century)*. 4th ed. Kashmir: Gulshan Books, 2005.
- Khan, Mohammad Ishaq. "The Impact of Islam on Kashmir in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586)." In *India's Islamic traditions, 711-1750* . New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003. 363-392.
- Kotru, Nil Kanth. *Lal Ded: Her Life & Sayings*. Delhi: Utpal Publications, 1989.
- Larson, Gerald James. *Classical Samkhya; an interpretation of its history and meaning..* [1st ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969,
- Leeming, David. "Religion and Sexuality: The Perversion of a Natural Marriage." *Journal of Religion and Health* 42, no. 2 (2003): 101-109.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27511667> . (accessed April 29, 2011).
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Need for a Sacred Science* . Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Rafiabadi, Hamid Naseem. *Islam and Sufism in Kashmir: some lesser known dimensions*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2009.
- Razdan, P. N.. *Gems of Kashmiri literature and Kashmiriyat: the trio of saint poets*. New Delhi: Samkaleen Prakashan, 1999.
- Roberts, Michelle Voss. *May Your Heart Dissolve: Duality and Relation in Mehtchild of Magdeburg and Lalla of Kashmir*. Atlanta: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Emory University, 2006.



Saqi, M. L.. *Kuliyat-i-Sheikh-UI-Alam*. Delhi: NA, 1985.

Shulman, David Dean. *Tamil temple myths: sacrifice and divine marriage in the South Indian Saiva tradition*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Sopori, B. N.. "*Voice of experiences*": *Lal vaakh of Lal Ded/Lali Shori of Kashmir (India), the greatest lady of last millennium : a text book on sadhna, agelessness, immortality and spiritual grace : a peep into higher humanity*. Jammu: B.N. Sopori, 1999.

Temple, Richard Carnac. *The Word of Lalla the Prophetess: being the sayings of Lal Ded or Lal Diddi of Kashmir; Done into English verse from the Lalla-Vakyani ... and annotated*. Tennessee: Kessinger Publishing, 1924.

Toshkhani, Śaśiśekhara. *Lal Ded: The Great Kashmiri Saint-Poetess*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2002.

Zelliot, Eleanor. "A Medieval Encounter Between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath's Drama-Poem Hindu-Turk Samvad." In *India's Islamic traditions, 711-1750*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003. 64-82.