Mysticism in Kashmiri poetry

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INTRODUCTION

It is Kashmiri poetry that brought the Kashmiri literature to the fore of prominence. The Kashmiri poetry by the prominent lady saint known as Lal Ded is full of mysticism. This poetry is traced to a period about seven hundred years ago. This poetic voice influenced the Kashmiris and it was retained in memory and passed from generation to generation till it was written down and published in twentieth century.

The poetry of Lal Ded brought to fore the plight of Kashmiri women in those days. Of course the poetry of Lal Ded is full of mysticism. The form of her poetry is known as Vakh (a four-line quatrain, thematically complete and independent in itself and mystical or didactic in content) in Kashmiri literature.

Lal Ded is the first woman mystic to preach medieval mysticism in Kashmiri poetry. She used metaphors, riddles and other mediums for her expression. She has left an impact on the spiritual life of Kashmiris. Her 'Vakhs', which are poetic compositions of four or sometimes more than four lines, are full of mystic excellence with a spiritual depth and clarity. Lal Ded's verses usually called as 'Lalla Vakhs' are an assertion of her personal spiritual experience.

Lal Vakhs preach equality, tolerance, universal love, harmony and brotherhood irrespective of caste, colour and creed. The following mystic verses bear testimony of her spiritual experience:

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Lal bw tsayas swmanu baagubaras
Vuchhum Shiv-Shakht miilith tuvah
Taty lai karum amratu saras
Zindai maras tu me kari kyah
(Vakh no 68. Lal and Her Vaakh)
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"I, Lalla, entered through the garden of my soul, Lo! I saw Shiva and Shakti rolled in one, Overwhelmed with joy, I got immersed there in that lake of bliss.

Now I live like dead in complete surrender of my being to him."

She was born with a poetic soul and had a natural linguistic flair. Hence her experience found expression in such a poetic language as has an inspiration. She presents linguistic transition in 14th Century. Her Vakhs represent the dawn of the modern Kashmiri language. Her sayings are full of mysticism. These are deep and sublime. She held a key to too many mystic truths. The following stanza illustrates her deep mystic thought:

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Damu damu kormas daman aayee
Prazlyoom diif tu naneeyam zaath
Andrim prakaash nyabar tshottum
Gatti rottum tu karmas thaf.
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(Damoo Damu kormas Damman Aayee. (Vakh no.4. Lal And Her Vaakh)

Slowly, steadily myself did control
My lamp alight, I saw my troth
The light within, out did broadcast
The true I held in the dark, fast.

(Translated by R L Bhat)

Due to her communicative skills, her Vakhs are considered a literary treasure both for the common reader and the critics. For example:

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Aami pana sadras naavi chhas lamaan
kati boozi Dai myoon meti diyi taar
aamyan ttakayan poony zan shamaaan
zuv churn bramaan garu gatsuh haa.
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(Wakh No.97. Lal And Her Vaakh)

"With a string raw, my boat I draw, over the expanse:
Won't my Lord heed and vouch me a chance
Like the water oozing from an unbaked urn
My heart is raked by the longing to return."
Her 'Vakhs' speak of inner quest, inward control, self-purification, self-surrender and a sincere pursuit of spiritual perfection. Some of her sayings have now become proverbs in Kashmiri language and literature. For example;

1. **Mond maarytan kinu kath**
   lali niluvath tsali nu zanah
   (Whether they kill, a ram or sheep, it is all the same for Lalleshvari. She has always a stone in her plate of food)

2. **Aami panu sadras naavi chhas lamaan**
   (To row a boat across the sea with loose-spun thread.)

3. **Yinu manduchkhoh nu chanu kyachi chuhk manduchhan**
   (Not to be ashamed of taking birth but to hesitate from sucking milk)

4. **Seki shathas byol vavun**
   (To sow seeds in a desert (a wasteful effort)

5. **Komy yajyan til ravrun**
   (To waste oil on a dish of bran (a wasteful effort)

6. **Rajjas baaj yemy kartal paaj**
   (He who wields the sword a kingdom gains.)

7. **Mudas gyanuch kath vanuny**
   (To impart knowledge to a fool.)

   *(Lal And Her Vaakh)*

   In short, there is a great contribution of the illustrious saint poetess Lal Ded to the spiritual literature of Kashmir.

Another Kashmiri saint poet came to prominence in the time of Lal Ded. His name is Shaikh Noor-ud-din popularly known as Nund Reshi or Shaikhul Aalam in Kashmir. His poetry comprising hundreds of Shruks establishes the fact that he had a natural linguistic flair. He was a true poetic soul. His poetry comprising hundreds of Shruks establishes the fact that he had a natural linguistic flair. He was a true poetic soul. His poetry is full of mysticism. Realization of one’s own self and surrender and a sincere pursuit of spiritual life of Kashmiris. His poetry memorized by Kashmiris was passed from generation to generation till it was published in the 20th century. Manuscripts of his poetry were compiled by some Kashmiris are available in Kashmir which date back to some three hundred years ago. Some of these manuscripts are:

I. ‘ReshNama’ by Baba Kamal.
II. ‘Rauzatul Riyazat’ by Baba Khaleel.
III. ‘Kalam Shaikul Aalam’ by Meer Abdulla.

These manuscripts have great historical significance. His poetry added not only numerous phrase and idioms but also philosophical thoughts to the Kashmiri language. The great reformatory aspect of the Shiikh Noor-ud-din cannot be lost sight of. It speaks of the cultural and religious transition of Kashmiri society in 14th century C.E. It led to the transition of Kashmiri language and literature. The following stanzas illustrate his deep mystic thought:

1. **Zikri setey ratun malay**
   (Shrk no. 85 Kulyaat Shaikh-ul- Aalam)

   **Translation:**
   Remember God firmly.
   Ponder over what He says.
   Steadily control yourself.
   Like pearls held up in a garland.

2. **Nafsi kudu setey aeti**
   (Shrk no. 219 Kulyaat Shaikh-ul- Aalam)

   **Translation:**
   My ‘self’ put me to shame.
   My ‘Self’ put me to repentance.
   Self is like a young elephant
   Who breaks the reins.
   He who controls his ‘self’
   Can reach the destiny.

3. **Sangr lostis kanger tseywum**
   (Shrk no. 213 Kulyaat Shaikh-ul- Aalam)

   **Translation:**
   My kanger put out at the sunset
   Lighted the firewood to put it in.
   Winnowed the useless heap of crop
   Instead of the heap of useful crop.
   He took away my intellect
   Instead of silver and gold.
   I kept with me the brass
   Formed out of it the sickles.
   I broke my sword and
   Won over me.
   I kept with me the brass
   Instead of silver and gold.

In these verses a number of mystical lessons have been taught. The expressions have been made in common Kashmiri language. This versatile mystic style of expression of Shruks of Nund Reshi is unique and unparalleled to this date. It is in place...
to mention that the words were in his hands like a potter’s wet clay and he would make out of it whatever he wanted.

His mystic approach is known as ‘Reshyut’ in Kashmir. The word ‘Reshyut’ means the ‘way of Reshi’ and ‘Reshi’ means a saint or mystic devoted to God. The ‘Reshyut’ is known as Muslim Sufism in common masses in Kashmir. The Reshis are held in great esteem by the Kashmiris. The people all over the Kashmir valley pay homage to these Reshis and regard them beacons of spirituality. Shaikh Noor-ud-din is most respected of all the Reshis. The spiritualism practised by the Reshis, like abstinement from eating meat and fish for some days is still in practice in some parts of Kashmir. It can be termed as spiritual healing also.

A Shruk from the poetry of Nund Reshi is reproduced below to let us know about the hypocrites of his time. It applies to the hypocrites of the present time and even to those of the future time.

Aelmuk bor ludhek kharan
Karan gunah bandgi sahibe se
Hasde nifakeh praketh baran
Tim hawaleh kerikh shatan se.
(Shruk no 163.Kulyaat Shaikh-ul-Aalam)

Translation:

The donkeys carry the load of knowledge
Commit they sins instead of worship
Filled themselves with jealousy, hypocrisy
And surrendered themselves to the Satan.

The form of poetry used by Nund Rishi is known as Shruk, which is a four-line composition thematically complete. He has himself used the word “Shruk” in his verses. Such as:

Kan thau shruken Hazrat Quranes-meaning to hear the verses of Holy Quran.
Kan thau shruken baye panj suran-meaning to hear his verses and verses of five surahs of Quran.
(Shruk no.50 & 98.Kulyaat Shaikh-ul-Aalam)

A good number of the Shruks of Shaikh Noor-ud-din have been unjustly mingled into the compiled poetry of Lal Ded. The renowned Kashmiri poet and writer Moti Lal Saaqi writes in this regard:


Now it is established that he himself has called his poems as ‘Shruks’. It shows that Nund Reshi had a great experience and observation in the matters he had dealt with in his poetry. A great number of his sayings have now become proverbs, idioms and similies in Kashmiri language and literature. Mark the marvelous similies used by Nund Reshi in one of his famous Shruks: For example:

A saint was lost amongst
A gang of thieves:
A gorgeous swan, was lost
Amidst flock of crows.
(Shruk No.19. Kulyaat Shaikh-ul-Aalam)

Some of his great number of proverbs, idioms and similies are as under:

1. Yus kare gongul sooi kare kraew-meaning that whosoever toils and sows in spring will reap the harvest.
2. Soreh senzeh wudeh aasi Moreh sund taj-meaning the worthless persons would be adorned. The literal expression says that a pig would be adorned by beautiful feathers of peacock. (The Ark: Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali- Poet and the Reformist)
3. Moolen droot patren sug-meaning to water a plant after its roots were cut down, that is to say to do something which is not fruitful.
4. Aan Poshi teli yeli won Poshi-meaning the forest are a source of food; food production is subservient to forests.
5. Aelim chui sandooks soen barun-meaning knowledge is like gold put in a box.
6. Aosus sas spnus soen-meaning transformed into gold from ashes.
7. Metze kartum guzar-meaning to turn dust into a garden of flowers.
8. Kya kare mukhte ho hoomis-meaning a garland of pearls is of no use for a dog.
9. Berar senz loor peyi koker putis-meaning a stick thrown on a cat hit the chicken.
10. Kya kare aenis padman-meaning a beautiful lady is no attraction for a blind.
11. Loreh rus aenis wath kus hawy-meaning a blind person has but to depend on his stick.
12. Veri kanis phal nou boway-meaning a willow tree cannot bear fruit.
13. Bangeh kanis amber tshotay--meaning a bang plant has a thin bark.
14. Rembel guel teh shobjeh metzhe-meaning beautiful hands and attractive body-build.
15. Tzhendun tzeteth arkhool sogum-meaning to plant arkhool instead of sandal plant.
16. Sameh neh tathul teh nao-meaning a tathul is no match for a boat. A tathul is a big wooden pot somewhat in the form of a boat used in Kashmir till 1970.
17. Sameh neh raazehonzus lareh kaw-means a crow is not to fly down straight i.e. to say a misfortune comes unawares.
18. Tandrusti chey nametz saasa-meaning health is as good as a thousand blessings.
19. Ganth kya zaneh aayere wasun-meaning a kite knows not to fly down straight i.e. to say a misfortune comes unawares.
20. Haanth kya zaneh prusun kyat-meaning a barren woman knows no pangs of delivery.
21. Adeh kaeteh ravelhay kahan gaow- it literary means that the eleven men would not have lost cow- it speaks of disunity amongst men. It is a most common proverb in use in Kashmir.
22. Hateh honaeh khatel zang-meaning offering his leg by a person to a dog to bite it on.I.e. to cause harm by one to one’s own self.
23. Yerwen nao-meaning a boat floating without a boatman.

The poetry of Nund Reshi provides not only the good number of numerous phrases, idioms and similies but also philosophical thoughts to the Kashmiri language which adds beauty of expression to it. From his great number of poetic verses, it is evident without any doubt that he had great inborn communicative skills. His poetry is a great literary treasure; it comprises hundreds of Shruks. His Shruks have been fascinating the common people of Kashmir for the last so many centuries. A great number of his Shruks are on the tongue tips of Kashmiris and a good number of his sayings are now in daily use in Kashmir in the form of phrases, idioms and similies. He is regarded as the founder of modern Kashmiri language and literature. The growth of modern Kashmiri language and literature owes its indebtedness to him which is borne out by thousands of his verses.

His Shruks are so varied in expression that everyone is fascinated by their content and rhythm. They are so fascinating to memorise that even a common Kashmiri commits them to memory. True it is that the Kashmiri language gained momentum by his poetry. His poetry has left an everlasting impact on the spiritual and cultural life of Kashmiris.

Nund Reshi in his mystic life wandered from place to place in Kashmir, preaching virtues, good human values, living a simple life, sympathy, devotion to God, etc. He remained an example for the Kashmiris to follow and is still regarded as the example. It is his simple life, selfless and sincere devotion to God that raised him to greatest respectable position in Kashmir. On one occasion he says about his experiences in mystic life, when he wandered from place to place in Kashmir:

Wandered from place to place in Kashmir
No one opened the door of his house for me
But when I made my apparel good
They came to host me.
(Shruk no.170. *Kulyaat Shaikh-ul- Aalam*)

The contribution of Nund Reshi to the Kashmiri language and literature is unique and unparalleled. In-short, his poetry confirms Nund Reshi as a great soul, saint philosopher and a mystic poet of highest status in Kashmir.

REFERENCES