

## Nuditas Virtualis: A Jungian Analysis of Lal Ded's Vaakhs

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### ABSTRACT

Lal Ded is the North Star amongst the mystics of Kashmir. It is said that when Lal Ded left her husband's home, she wandered naked, dancing and singing. The symbolism of Nakedness is multilayered and complex. We are all born into this world naked, pure nothing to hide. Nakedness then represents a return to one's true nature; at the same time nakedness can also be symbolic of unbridled sexuality. In the present paper, an attempt is made to analyze the theme of Nakedness in Lal Ded's sayings or 'vaakhs' from the perspective of analytical psychology revealing the symbolically rich world of Lal Ded's mystical poetry to a larger audience outside the milieu of Kashmiri society.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, Lal Ded, Mysticism, Kashmir Shaivism, Analytical Psychology

Lalleshwari more fondly remembered as Lal Ded, which when translated into English means grandmother Lalla. A follower of *Kashmir Shaivism*, she is revered by all in the valley irrespective of their religious background. The life of *Lal Ded* is shrouded in legend; there is disagreement within the scholars about various details of her life, however, what is indisputable is that her *vaakhs* and their spirit pervade the countryside of Kashmir. Lal Ded helped Kashmiris to discover their mother tongue and their soul as a people. Lal Ded's *vaakh* are a significant landmark in the linguistic transition from old to modern Kashmiri. Grierson (2013) even claims that they are the oldest known specimen of the Kashmiri language. The *vaakh* is usually a four-line stanza, complete and independent a sententious gnomic verse. The sense seldom runs on into another stanza. There are, however, several *vaakh* that have a common refrain and a few are in the form of questions and answers. Her poetry is alive for Kashmiris even today; as it is still recited and read in the times of trouble and confusion by the members of the community.

One of the most famous anecdotes which is known of Lal Ded's life is that when she left her unhappy marital life and her husband's home behind and "Fired as she was with divine love, she tore away her clothes and began to roam about naked" (Koul 1921, pp-304) earning her notoriety as the wandering, dancing, and naked mystic of Kashmir. On the superficial level, the image of a naked woman and a mystic might seem antithetical in nature but on a deeper analysis, one realizes the unity between the two. The ancient thinkers of the Renaissance period understood this mystery and gave the phrase "*Nuditas Virtualis*" which refers to a form of nudity "as the symbol of purity and innocence. It represents those in this world who,

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though engaged in the activities of life, nevertheless are not overcome by the evil and temptation which surround them. It represents the high and the desirable quality of the virtuous life" (Ferguson, 1954, pp- 49).

## METHODOLOGY

Starting off as an imminent member of the psychoanalytic movement eventually Carl Jung found himself drifting away from the main stream movement due to his own experiences with the psyche. Following his split with Freud in 1913, Carl Jung adopted a constructive approach towards interpretation and analysis of psychic activity. By constructive he meant based on its goal or purpose rather than its cause and source which was the reductive approach as proposed by Freud. He also believed that the contents of the psyche (dreams, myths etc) need to be analyzed in a symbolic manner only then we can go to the sub soil of human psyche from which the human life emerges. With these points in mind Jung developed certain specialized techniques for data analysis. For the present study the technique used is called Archetypal Amplification.

The method of Archetypal amplification can be defined as a "method of comparative morphological psychology, which interprets analogous material from the most varied spheres of religious history, archeology, pre-historic studies, ethnology and so on" (Neumann, 1991, pp-13). By using this method, the researcher elaborates on the symbols allowing a meaningful context to emerge which helps the researcher uncover a richer understanding of the workings of the psyche. Taking this point of view forward in the present paper, the theme of *Nakedness* is analyzed in Lal Ded's sayings or 'vaakhs' from the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology.

### Analysis

"He laughs when you laugh, sneezes in your sleep,  
yawns for you, coughs for you.  
He bathes every day in the river of your thoughts.  
He's naked, all year round, and walks where you walk.  
Just go up and introduce yourself."

(Ded & Hoskote, 2013, pp- 74)

There several ways to get oneself acquainted with the divine, some prefer the path of the scriptures while others move a step beyond and aspire to have a personal experience of the divine. Lal Ded here is talking about her experience of divine. Lal Ded calls this divinity as Shiva; he is the Self in man. The name of Lord *Shiva* means the pure one; he is purified of all forms, one who is transcendental in his very nature. He is white as camphor also called *Karpura Gauranga*. White is that color which we get when all colors of the spectrum is reflected similarly, Shiva reflects everything material as they are ephemeral in nature. He is often called *Digambar* the sky clad naked who needs no clothes, indicating closeness to the spirit than to the body and embodiment of infinity itself. It is this Shiva who is omnipresent and transcendent in nature that Lal Ded is meditating on; it is her god image, her symbol of Self.

The great ancient thinker *Yajñyavalka* in *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* defined this Self as, "He who dwells in all beings, yet is apart from all beings, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings, who controls all beings from within, he is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal.... There is no other seer than but he, no other hearer but he, no other perceiver but he, no other knower but he. He is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal. All else is

sorrow” (Radhakrishnan 2018, pp-228). This immortal is that which animates the world around us; be it mineral, plant, and animal nothing and no one is without its presence, this is Lal Ded's *Shiva*. In the modern field of psychology, Carl Gustav Jung was one of the earliest thinkers to talk about a similar concept of self. He had studied eastern philosophies extensively and “noted trends in the Indian philosophy that considered ego to be a component of an all-embracing totality of Self similar to his own findings in the psychology of the unconscious” (Jung 1959, pp-350). He borrowed the term self from Upanishads to define “the ‘supraordinate’ or ‘suprapersonal’ centre of personality which is at the same time, ‘totality of man, the sum total of his conscious and unconscious content’” (Colman,2006, pp-155). Jung extensively worked in the latter half of his life dealing with the questions of divine and its relationship to the self. He concluded that God images were in fact symbolic representations of self. “The spontaneous symbols of self, or of wholeness, cannot be in practice distinguished from a God-image” (Jung, 1959, pp-40). The term ‘*Imago dei*’ or God image is an ancient theological concept common to the Abrahamic religions which states that mankind was created in image and likeness of God. The great Christian philosopher, St Augustine writes that this “God image is within, not in the body.... Where the understanding is, where the mind is, where the power of investigating the truth is, there God has his image” (Jung,1959, pp-38). This God image therefore in the words of the great philosopher, is in the realm of psyche which encompasses all kinds of intellectual activities which are uniquely human.

*Shiva* is the divine in man, the sacred center of one's being yet he is omnipresent. He is part of all mundane activities that man does, be it mental or physical ones. Lal Ded says ‘*he sneezes in your sleep*’ (Ded & Hoskote, 2013, pp- 74), in ancient Greece it was widely believed that when someone sneezes it is a prophetic sign from gods, so he is even leaving signs for us in our dreams when we sleep. She goes on to describe ‘*He bathes every day in the river of your thoughts*’ (Ded & Hoskote, 2013, pp- 74). The act of bathing symbolizes the cleansing and renewal of connection between *Shiva* and man. As water is the catalyst for cleansing and renewal of our physical body, so are our thoughts are the catalyst for transformation of our relationship with the divine.

Lal Ded goes on to describe *Shiva* as being naked all year long. Regarding being the nakedness of the divine, J.L Bhat writes in his book, *Lal Ded Revisited* (2014), “The word ‘*nonuy aasun*’ may also suggest that the Lord is always open to the call of a sincere devotee. He is never hidden from the view of one who seeks him because he is closer to him than anything else being an integral part of his self” (Bhat, 2014, pp-464). Nakedness here of *Shiva* that resides in sacred core of Lal Ded is his distinctness from the material world and his immortal, imperishable nature. No matter what season it is either in the world outside or in the world that lies in us he is the constant that is present and approachable in all seasons.

Despite being spiritual adept of highest order, Lal Ded in this verse is not prescribing rigorous spiritual practices and rituals. It is as simple as introducing yourself to any other person. It is not a herculean task which requires one to jump through number of hurdles rather it's just about recognizing the divine in our day-to-day life. This Self in us, resides with us in our own body. Lal Ded is calling all our attentions to signs and miracles that *Shiva* shows us in our bodies. The only requirement is that one is able to shift their awareness and can recognize the glimpse of *Shiva* in our mundane life. This teaching of Lal Ded is in line with the *Pratyabhijñā* school of Kashmir Shaivism. The definition of the word ‘*Pratyabhijñā*’ means “to recognize, to realize your Self spontaneously once again” (Joo, 1991, pp-132). There are no methods in this school for self-realization, you simply recognize

your true nature. The moment when the recognition comes to an individual spontaneously, he realizes that his true nature is divine. No practice, no meditation is required rather it is all about the shift of awareness.

“My Master gave me just one rule:  
Forget the outside, get to the inside of things.  
I, Lalla, took that teaching to heart.  
From that day, I've danced naked.”

(Ded & Hoskote, 2013, pp- 97)

This vaakh is one of the most famous verse of Lal Ded creating her image as being the exotic naked wanderer from Kashmir. The Guru is the guide of one's spiritual journey, and the rule given to Lal Ded is to turn the gaze inwards and seek sanctuary in your Self. This is termed as '*Diksha*' in the *Guru shishya* tradition which is a part of Indian spiritual traditions. It is an initiation of the novice by his/her chosen guru into a serious spiritual practice. M.L. Kaul writes regarding this verse that Lal Ded “uses '*Kunuy Vachun*' which stands for mantra impregnated letters or symbols as pointers to '*anhata*', I-consciousness of Shiva. In Shaiva yoga mantra is the main shaktopaya for self-recognition” (Kaul 2013, pp-37). This mantra given by the guru is the divine key which will unlock all the divine mysteries for her. The guru tells her that what needs to be repeatedly practiced, is contemplation and inwardness. This attitude of inwardness required that she turned her gaze into her own heart, while at the same time he wants her also to learn to peep into the heart of the universe. This first action will reveal her true self to her while the second action will reveal the true nature of the universe to her. She kept practicing and applying the mantra that her Guru had given her. When she entered her heart, she saw her true nature her divine self and was overcome with a wave of bliss.

Parimoo writes “spiritual volcano which was gaining momentum, and finally the dynamite burst with a devastating effect on her natural shyness and reserve” (Parimoo 1978, pp-60). This joy or *Ananda* was derived due to realization of one's true nature and is more lasting than any joy or pleasure derived from the outside world. Lal Ded had found that never ending source of bliss. In Kashmir Shaivism it is believed that “Shiva as Shakti manifests Himself as a correlated order of knowers, knowable and means of knowledge. This threefold subdivision of Shiva appears in the background provided by Shiva himself. It presupposes a limitation imposed by Shiva Himself. The self-limited shiva is designated the Pasu or animal, Jiva etc.... To realize the unfettered condition, to recognize oneself as that which has become or even is everything, to have unlimited power to be, to know, enjoy, manifest self-bliss to be infinite and eternal.... Rather to recognize oneself as Shiva is the goal of the Jiva” (Basu 1956, pp-92).

*Shiva* is the transcendental one, beyond all forms; he is *Digambara* the sky clad naked he is completely indifferent to the cultural construction and the material world. He offers the power of higher brain over the lower brain, he is *Pashupati* master of animal instincts, he offers the promise of *Abhaya* no fear of death he offers immortality. When a spiritual seeker finally realizes his true Shiva nature, he/she becomes indifferent to the outward form, our skin, our hair, our dress etc. The only thing of value is the richness and vitality of one's inner world.

The last line of this verse has created some disagreement amongst the scholars. Lal Ded has used the words “*Nangay Natsun*” here. Now Kashmiri word *natsun* can be translated as both ‘to wander’ and ‘to dance’, so some have translated it as to wandering naked while some as

dancing naked. While there is also a third way to translate it as well, some have chosen to see *nangay* as a corruption of *nonga* which is a name of a mountain flower. So, it has also been translated as 'dancing like a mountain flower' (Odin, 1999, pp-35). But if we look and analyze closely, all the different kinds of imagery are hinting towards the same meaning. All the three translations hint toward a state which can be described as 'wild.' Here it must be emphasized I use the term wild not in a pejorative sense meaning out of control rather here wild means that which is natural, a more natural life. A mountain flower grows in the wilderness without any kind of intervention. It will grow and thrive when the conditions are right and die a timely death when the season passes. It is away from the culture of man which turn wilderness into controlled garden; similarly, Lal Ded by turning her gaze inwards, turns her attention away from society and culture from its dos and don'ts and turns 'Wild' when she gets in touch with her Self.

Dancing is considered as one of the most ancient forms of magic; an art form that leads the artist to experience the divine in him. While dancing he can experience his personality transforming, get a glimpse of the divine and in fact have the elusive experience of merger into the divine essence. Ancient civilizations were aware of the power of dance hence they had dances for different occasions. Heinrich Zimmer noted "Pantomimic dance is intended to transmute the dancer into whatever demon, god or earthly existence he impersonates" (Zimmer & Campbell, 1972, pp-151-152). Dance is one of the ways to tap into our higher personalities. He further shares that in the Indian context, Dance has flourished parallel to the yoga and meditative austerities. "Shiva is apparently, thus two opposite things: Archetypal ascetic and Archetypal Dancer. On one hand he is total tranquility; inward calm totally absorbed in itself, absorbed in the Void of the Absolute, where all distinctions merge and dissolve and all tensions are at rest. But on the other hand, he is total activity- life's energy, Frantic, aimless, and playful" (Zimmer & Campbell, 1972, pp-167). "When Thou beginnest to stir, Thou unfoldest the Entire Universe" exclaims Utpaladeva in praise of the Dance of Shiva (Silburn, 1988, pp-5). About this Dance of Shiva, Anand Coomaraswamy wrote "A great motif in religion or art, any great symbol becomes all things to all men; age after age it yields to men such treasure as they find in their own hearts. Whatever the origins of Siva's dance, it became in time the clearest image of the activity of God which any art or religion can boast of" (Coomaraswamy, 1918, pp-56).

Shiva is Nataraja who teaches through dance as words are too literal to capture the intangible *Nirguna*. Tandav is a forceful dance demanding attention, thought evoking and enlightening. He dances to maintain life in the cosmos and to lift the veil of illusion from the eyes of the seekers leading them to freedom. The dance represents Shiva's five activities or *Panchakriya*; *Srishti* (creation), *Sthiti* (reservation), *Samhara* (destruction), *Tirobhava* (illusion) and *Anugraha* (release, salvation, and grace). *Shiva* destroys so that there may be new creation, he creates the illusions in our minds regarding our true natures and he is the one who through his grace will release us. This is his cosmic dance which keeps the world spinning.

When Lal Ded had a glimpse of her true nature, she was overwhelmed emotionally and spiritually. To express something which as ephemeral and elusive as the first experience of her true Self in words is impossible. She chooses to use the whole body as a medium to share her experience. She starts embodying her truth when words failed her. The world became her dancing stage and she started dancing her hearts out. The nakedness of Lal Ded is paradoxical in nature, one is born naked and when one dies their body is stripped of

clothes which are closely related to an individual's identity viz a viz the society at large. Like Shiva, she destroyed her old persona and birthed a new authentic self.

### CONCLUSION

The theme of nakedness in the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded brings to forefront the body of the mystic Lal Ded. The god she is venerating is *Shiva* in her and in the same vein the knowledge shared by Lal Ded is her lived and experienced learning. Everything she learned from her gurus she made sure she practiced and then summarized in these dense verses. Rather than rejecting the body or seeing the body as an impediment in her spiritual path Lal Ded expounds a way which glorifies the body as the path to the divine. What is required is a change of perspective which consequently transforms the body which earlier been a cause of bondage into the path that will lead to ultimate freedom and liberation. Lal Ded shares that anyone can undergo this transformation if one is willing to dive deep into the dark realm of their own psyche, scholarly pursuits alone will not lead one afar on this path. Ideally, a marriage of knowledge, given by an adept, a worthy guru along with your individual actions will lead to the seeker to gain their divine sovereignty. This sovereignty which is embodied by Shiva will also be revealed to individual when he awakes to the awareness of unity of Shiva and himself. According to Kashmir Shaivism, realization of autonomy or *Svatantrya* is an important milestone on the journey of self-realization. The great Kashmir Shaivism Philosopher, Abhinavgupta said: "The person who comes thus to realize that knowledge (*Jnana*) and activity (*Kriya*) are solely manifestations of the *Svatantrya* and that these manifestations are inseparable from oneself and from the very essence of the ultimate, whose form is the Lord (*Isvararupa*)-a person "resonating" in such a fashion (*Iti Paramrsan*), not partially (but completely), and who has come to see that knowledge and activity are really one-whatever such a person desires, just that he or she comes to show and do. Such a person is solely given over practice of "total abiding" (*Samavesa*), even though still accompanied by a body. To be sure, such a person, while still in the body, is a *Jivanmukta*; but such a person is even more than that; for when the ultimate realization has come there is only *Paramesvara*" (*Isvarapratyabhijna-vimarsani* IV.1.15, pp-269). Finally, we can conclude that nakedness, in the verses of Lal Ded symbolizes the experience of autonomy which Lal Ded gained as a result of her endeavors towards self-realization. This nakedness epitomizes the transformed self of Lal Ded, which transcended the bondages on the path of Self-realization as simply as one discards an ill-fitting costume.

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