
A Comparison of the Poetry of Lal-Ded, a Kashmiri Mystic Poet and Maulana Jalaludin Rumi, a Persian Spritual Poet

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*The Students of B.A. Honors, Final Year, A.S. College, Srinagar, (J&K) India***Abstract**

The paper aims at discussing the poems of Lal-ded and Rumi as spiritual poets in a comparative context. Lal-ded and Rumi belong to different places, ages, cultures and religion, yet their poetry share some common traits of mysticism and spirituality. The theory of comparative literature gives us an idea to compare the two mystic poets. The paper discusses the biography of the two poets and then some of the Vakh's of Lal-ded are compared to Rumi's verses.

Key Words: Mystic, Spirituality, Mysticism, Comparative Literature, Soul, Spirit, Body

Lal-ded a Kashmiri mystic poet and Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, a Persian mystic poet are contemporaries but they don't belong to same place and culture, neither they write in the same language, yet both have certain common features which help us to take both as the poets under comparative study.

Comparative literature is a recognized interdisciplinary discourse which has a solid basis that makes it possible to undertake comparative assessment of any of any two literatures of any ages, cultures and milieus. Lal -ded and Maulana Rumi despite the visible differences, have many things common: however, comparative study is not confined to exploring commonalities alone, it embraces contrasts as well. Many critical texts dating from before the 19th century to present days may be consistent with one or more criteria qualifying them as 'comparatist'. However as the discipline in its present time is relatively recent, the present study will mainly focus on the

poems of two writers Lal-ded and Maulana Rumi and their contributions to the development of comparative literature.

The founder of Kashmiri poetry, Lal ded, a fourteenth century mystic female poet born in 1320 in Pandrethan, Kashmir, is most famous for her Vatsun poetry called Lal Vakh. Each vakh consists of four lines. Her poetry is an important part in history of modern Kashmiri literature. She belonged to a Kashmiri Pandit family but was no bigot so her poetry has the universal appeal.

Very little is known about her life yet all traditions agree that she was a contemporary of Syed Ali Hamadani, the saint who played a pivotal role in converting Kashmir to Islam. It is clearly seen from her poems that she was a Yogini which means a follower of the Kashmiri branch of the Shaiva religion. Her verses were the earliest compositions in Kashmiri language. She continued the mystic tradition of Shivaism which was known as the Trika before 1900. Lal ded succeeded in inspiring the leading Sufi poet

of Kashmir, Sheikh Noor ud din Wali (Nund Reshi). The folk stories also prove it true that Nund Reshi refused to be fed by her mother, Sadr-e-mouj and it was Lal ded who breast-fed him. Lala is too named by other names as Lal Arifa, Lal Didi, Laleshwari, Lal shiri and yogiswari in Sanskrit. Her verses (Vakh) have been translated into English by Jaylal Kaul. After living a life of seventy two years Lalla ded died in 1392.

Myriads of stories are heard about Lalla in the valley but probably all Kashmiri folk stories believe that she was married at the age of twelve that proved utterly an unhappy marriage. Her mother-in-law treated her brutally and almost every day starved her. As it is famous of her saying:

Hund marin kath marin
Lalli nalwath chali ne zanh
Whether they cook beef or mutton
Lalla is destined to stay half-hungry.

She is said to have been uttering these sighs to her friends when washing and scrubbing the kitchen pots on the stream-side (Yaari-bal). It was over heard by her father-in-law by chance on passing that path when he pondered over it and reached home, he took her plate and the situation proved true. It is the most known example given of the cruelty of Lalla's mother-in-law. The harsh woman always tried to cajole Lalla's husband that she is unfaithful to him but her virtue and patience always proved it false. The wicked woman started to use other crafty devices and at length succeeded in turning her out of her house. That was the day Lala became a wanderer and took a Kashmiri Shaiva saint named Sed Boy as her Guru. After she started dancing and

singing in half-nude condition. It is also said that she never felt disgraced in that way before the men in society. She used to say them that they were the men feared God. When Syed Ali Hamadani arrived in Kashmir and she saw him in the distance. She cried aloud, 'I have seen a man' she ran fast, leapt into the burning oven in a baker's shop and disappeared. Hamadani pursued her and inquired about her but baker's wife denied out of fear that she has seen any woman. After suddenly Lalla reappeared from the oven, donned in the green gown of paradise. Her songs also give us the proof that she was wandering in a half-nude state.

Actually there is no authentic manuscript of her compositions. It is a sort of literature which was by the ancient Indian system recorded on the memory and carried ahead from generation to generation of teachers and pupils as a word of mouth. That is why we don't have Lalla's songs in exact form in which she uttered them. They were said in the odd form of Kashmiri language. Because of the change of language insensibly from generation to generation, the outward form of the verses have too changed in recitation. However the metrical form of the songs has preserved a great many archaic forms of expression.

Her poetry is not a deliberate attempt to what Eliot calls "organization" but they are written in a frenzy situation (Ilham). The most interesting fact in her poetry is the simplicity and yet profound and thoughtful.

Jalal-al-din Rumi, a 13th century Persian poet and a Sufi mystic was born in Balkh in 1207. He was inspired by his father Baba ud din Walad, a mystic, jurist and a theologian

known as Sultan ul ulma. Besides his father were the Persian poets Attar and Sunai who influenced him. His masnavi composed in Konya is taken as one of the great poems in Persian language. Attar who was the mystic poet in the Iranian city of Nishapur located in the area of Khorasan; got fascinated by Rumi's spiritual enlightenment and bestowed to Rumi a book 'Asrarnama' which proved a magic influence on Rumi's psyche and on his works. Rumi traversed to many places as Baghdad, Hejaz and performed pilgrims at Mecca. He too passed through Damascus and other cities. Finally he resided in Karama with his family and other Sufi and mystic companions for seven years. Rumi's brother and mother both died there. In 1225 he married Gowher Khatun and gave birth to two sons – Sultan walad and Ala-ud-din Chalabi. On dying his wife, he married again and had a son Amir Ali Chalabi and a daughter Malakeh Khatun. At the age of 25, Rumi took the position of Islamic Molavi when the head (Baha-ud-din) of a madrasa (religious school). Syed Burhan-ud-din Muhaqiq Tirmizi continued to teach Rumi the shariah as well as Tariqa. As a disciple of Burhan, Rumi stayed engaged in Sufism until Burhan died in 1241, Rumi began then to preach homilies and sermons to public in mosque of Konya. During this time he made an expedition to Damascus where he lived for 40 years. On 15 November 1244 he met Shams-e-Tabrizi who was turning point of his life. Utterly from a complete teacher and jurist he was transformed into an ascetic. Actually Shams had been searching and praying for a friend who could experience and sustain his company. Unfortunately on 5 December

1248 Rumi and Shams were talking together and Shams was called to the backdoor and was killed there and then. It was later bruited about that he was murdered by Rumi's son Ala-ud-din. Rumi got actually the tint of his beloved Shams and that is why the pang of pain deepened in his soul after Shams's mysterious death. He began to manifest that bereavement in lyric poems 'Divane Shams Tabrizi'. He constantly used to compose Ghazals that had been collected *Innthe Divan-e-Kabir or Divan-e- Shams Tabrizi*. Shams was to Rumi a symbol of ultimate soul – God.

Rumi after found another companion, Salah ud din Zarkub, a gold smith when he too died, Rumi's favourite student Hussam Chelbi became his companion. It was Hussam who implored Rumi to jot down masnavis. Rumi spent his last 20 years of his life in Anatolica dictating the six volumes of his master piece, the masnavi to Hussam.

Maulana Rumi was a celebrated mystic and poet. The masnavis explain the Quran explicitly. As in 'A letter from Europe', Rumi is defined by Iqbal as Charag-e-Rah (Lamp of the way of free man). Iqbal admits Rumi's masnavi as the Quran in Pahlavi. Rumi is considered as an eminent religious scholar. Muslims honor him with title of Moulwi-i-Masnawi (the doctor of meaning), a religious scholar, a philosopher and a spiritual phenomenon.

We consider a ground for similarities in Rumi and Lal's, it will be no hard to find out that it has nothing to do with the period - Rumi (1207 – 1273) and Lal Vakh (1320 – 1392) belonging to a much different age. Neither is there any obvious religious

similarity – Rumi a lover of Allah, Lal a devotee of Shiva (albeit there are evidences that Lal was much influenced by Islamic Mysticism). Neither can we purely count it as a regionally similarity. However, Similarities in Lal's Vakh and Rumi's Masnavi, even though startling, are conspicuous. Below is a set of such cases well categorized.

Both Lal-ded and Rumi are mystic poets. For the both self or soul is the main characteristics to find the ultimate soul. To Lal-ded self is a fact and not illusion. It is neither an abstract thought nor an idea. Both Lal and Rumi regard self as actuality, which when developed, attains tremendous powers.

The Openings

Consider the opening lines of Lal's Vakh (Vakh no. 1)

With a rope of lose-spun thread am I towing
My boat upon the sea.

Would that God heard my prayer
And brought me safe across...

Would God I were to reach my home!
(VAKH)

Its apparent in these lines that Lal - or for the sake of simplicity, the speaker- has gone somewhere, or has been expelled or coerced to leave a place (as hinted in the last verse, it's her home), and now she is homesick. She has a yearning to go home. This cannot be interpreted literally, for the symbols used and the metaphors involved in the poem are themselves mystic in nature. Back in that age, boats used to be the lone means of transport. They were a symbol of mobility and of freedom. They were the only objects connected to the 'external world'. It's not

the speaker here who yearns to meet her family, but the soul, who wants to get back to its "home". Here the speaker shows her urge to go back home because she has been cut off from her family and she can no longer live with all the past recollections.

Now to enable us to make a comparison, let's take a look at Rumi's opening verses:

HEARKEN to the reed-flute, how it complains,
Lamenting its banishment from its home
"Ever since they tore me from __ [word missing]...(RUMI)

Here is lamentation, yearning too but the speaker is not himself obtruding the pain, he rather uses a great symbol to show the same. The opening of the prologue of Rumi's Masnavi shows the same pain, although with violent intensity. There is nothing different in the idea: the flute, which is compared to the speaker's soul, wants to get back to the bough from which it has been torn. The idea becomes more complex when Rumi goes to say that the music of the reed-flute is in reality its lamentation, making the matter all deeper.

Moreover, in both of the opening verses, there is a mention of the "unripe" state of their respective souls. Lal compares herself to an unbaked clay cup, while Rumi refers directly to sensual eyes and sensual ears : which only depict the shallowness of outward senses. To both Lal and Rumi empirical body is the objectified self. To them body is not the cause of the mind but is created by the mind. To them self is not a datum; it is an achievement. Love to them is intensified by separation as it turns rawness of lover into ripeness. Or in other words, the

underdeveloped egos are developed by separation.

The Worldly Desire

A Yogni or a Sufi have to get over the worldly desires in order to achieve spiritual freedom. Unless they achieve it they are simply worldly or earthly lovers. In the path of renunciation, they come across a lot of hurdles and the hatred for the worldly objects – which is usually counted as wealth – increases, thus the travelers of the spiritual path lament and censure them.

Rumi says:

Arise, O son! Burst thy bonds and be free!
How long wilt thou be captive to silver
and gold?
Though thou pour the ocean into thy
pitcher,
It can hold no more than one day's
store.(RUMI)

It needs no paraphrase. Obviously Rumi has known the vanity of worldly wealth and wants to convey the same message. Lal does not lag behind. Her words are but cryptic and more allegorical:

There is a yawning pit underneath you,
And you are dancing overhead....
See, the riches you are amassing here,
Nothing of them will go with you.(Vakh)

The dance mentioned above is a reference to Shiva's Tandva. Both the poets believe that the fully developed self does not disintegrate. The really developed personality does not dissolve even when the reality is seen face to face as in mystic experience. Both believe that self-realization is a difficult process. It is tantamount to rebirth.

Inward senses and outward senses

In spiritualism, senses are divided into two broad categories, inward senses which comprise of 5 Bhutas in Trika Saiva, and their respective inward senses. An oft mistaken Vakh of Lal is based on this philosophy. Not only a Vakh, but Lal's whole spiritual journey seems to be guided by this philosophy.

Ah me! The five (Bhuta-s), the ten
(Indriyas),
And the eleventh their lord the mind,
Scraped this pot and went away.(Vakh)

The pot is her living body and it has been upset by her wild senses. This Vakh is often considered as an invocation of unity (if considered as optimistic).

Rumi too has the same belief, but the Islamic version of it, and that too is presented in lucid and simple form:

My secrets are not alien from my plaintive
notes,
Yet they are not manifest to the sensual
eye and ear. (Rumi)
The narrator here is the flute which is in
the lips of the great Rumi.

Concept of "Raw" and "Ripe"

Call it "raw" or "unbaked", call it what you will, all have the same idea to transfer. This shows the initial transcendental stage in the spiritual voyage. Lal in her initial Vakh's openly condemns her unbaked stage and wants to be ripe as soon as she may, but she has to take more steps towards her goal if she wants the "baked" or "ripe" stage. In this stage she laments her worldly desires as she tries her best to eliminate them, but the more or less impede her way:

Like water in cups of unbaked clay

I run to waste. (*Vakh 1*)

A wooden bow and rush grass for an arrow:

A carpenter unskilled and a palace to build (*Vakh 4*)

Rumi also has felt the same:

But all who are fishes are soon tired of water;

And they who lack daily bread find the day very long;

So the "Raw" comprehends not the state of the "Ripe";(Rumi)

Only a baked cup can hold water and is ready to be filled by it. So, in order to get filled, they try to achieve such state and in their path face numerous furnaces. In Lal's another *Vakh*, she takes body as subordinate to soul. Body is only to live till we reach that eternal soul, body is a vessel and soul its existence. Lal believes that soul is an independent entity. Soul originates in the realm of command and it is regarded as the creative act of God. Body is the earthly thing which is not eternal just a vessel to hold the eternal soul:

This counsel to the body give, O Soul*:

Wear only such clothes as ward off

Eat only to satisfy your hunger;

Devote yourself with all your heart

to the knowledge of the Supreme Self.

Consider this body to be food for the forest ravens.(*Vakh*)

Similarly, Rumi also believes body as objectified self. The body is not the cause of mind but is created by the mind as its instrument for working on the material or phenomenal plane.

Wine in ferment is a beggar suing for our ferment

Heaven in revolution is a beggar suing for our consciousness

Wine became intoxicated with us not we with it

The body came into being from us not we with it (Rumi)

In Lal's philosophy the entire process of achieving union with the ultimate soul is a practice and a transformation. From one stage to another Lal believes in metamorphosis. Once you change yourself into different ways you can achieve the goal.

I practiced what I read,

And learnt what was not taught.

From its jungle abode

I brought the lion down

as I a jackal would;

(From pleasures of the world

I pulled my mind away).

I practiced what I preached,

and scored the goal. (*Vakh*).

Rumi too believes in transformation of our being. According to Rumi this evolution passes through certain stages. The inanimate level is transformed to the animal and then to level of man. The evolution does not end up here. From man it climbs to the stage of angels and finally reaches the stage of union with ultimate soul.

I died to the inorganic and became endowed with growth

I died to vegetable growth and attained to the animal

I died from the animality and became man why

Then should I fear? When I have become less by dying?

At the next remove I shall die to man, that
I may soar and lift up my head
among the angels
once more I shall be sacrificed and die to
angels
I shall become that which enters not into
the imagination
Then I shall become non-existence: non-
existence said to me
Verily unto him shall we return. (Rumi)

Rumi has beautifully reconciled the idea of
creation with his revolutionary view.
Despite his being created out of clay man
did not get figure all at once and despite his
physical death he will lift up his head
amongst angels and even beyond.

Thus both Lal and Rumi are poets who
yearn for spiritual union with ultimate soul.
Through their different poems we get that
both the poets follow the path of spirituality
to achieve the union with God.

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