

Pure Consciousness: The Ultimate Truth in the Poetry of Laleshwari

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Abstract: A man's innermost aspiration is to decipher the ultimate truth, the truth beyond ordinary comprehension. The inception of spiritual enterprise is to acknowledge the ultimate truth. Laleshwari was a prominent figure in medieval Kashmiri language poetry. Laleshwari, through her poetry, explicates how spirituality assists in the realisation of pure consciousness, and it highlights the cosmic significance of objective manifestation. Her poetry is of immense value in contemporary times. It prompts an individual to reflect on the ultimate truth through self-knowledge. This paper attempts to explain pure consciousness through the metaphysical realm of Kashmir *Saivism* and how an individual comprehends and unravels the dimension of the ultimate truth. Pure consciousness is the rekindling of ordinary consciousness with cognition of the true inner self, which sustains the entire cosmos. It is granted to those with unflinching faith in a religion's exoteric and esoteric aspects. Her poetry discusses love as a driving force behind all experiences, the cause, and the end. Laleshwari's poetry alludes to the notion of spirituality that aims to provide an objective to life. It can be asserted that the true purpose of life is to strive towards pure consciousness. It is to acknowledge the divinity in its manifestation and to merge with the divine, which makes life meaningful.

Keywords: Pure Consciousness, Siva, Ultimate Truth, Self-knowledge, Divine love, Unity

Introduction: An Overview of Pure Consciousness

Consciousness is a fluid term with psychological as well as metaphysical meanings. The English word conscious derives from the Latin word *consciuis*, meaning to know within. Also, consciousness is awareness, subjectivity, sensibility, and wakefulness of the mind. The spiritual connotation of the word implies the relationship between the mind and the profound truths that are more important than the physical world.

The literature on the Saiva system can be classified into three categories: *Agama*, *Spanda*, and *Pratyabhijna*. *The Pratyabhijna Sastra* is a valuable resource that interprets the principal tenets of the Saiva philosophy through dialogues, arguments, refutations, and reasoning. The term “pratyabhijna” means “self-recognition.” According to the *Pratyabhijna Sastra*, an individual (*jiva*) forgets their true nature and becomes associated with their psycho-physical mechanism. The spiritual discipline can assist an individual in realising pure consciousness as their true self:

According to the Saiva system (*Siva-sasana*), there is only one existing entity—pure consciousness. Jaidev Singh, in *Siva Sutra—The Yoga of Supreme Identity*, elucidates that, Pure consciousness represents the ultimate truth or the supreme Self, also known as *Parasamvit* or *cit*. Siva, who holds the power of doer ship, is called *Sakti* (*Citi/Parasakti*). It is an immediate awareness of the self and can manifest, maintain, and absorb the universe into itself. *Prakashavimarsamaya* is an attribute of Siva, an eternal light who realises his grandeur, power, and beauty. Also, Siva possesses traits such as *Svatantrya* (*Sovereignty*), *iccha* (*Will*), *jnana* (*Knowledge*), *kriya* (*action*), and *ananda* (*Bliss*). *Paramsiva* has two aspects. It is both transcendent (*Visvottisna*) and immanent (*Visvamaya*). (xix-xx)

According to *Pratyabhijna Sastra*, the ultimate truth is pure consciousness (*Cit*). It is self-illuminating, enables immediate awareness of I-consciousness, and is non-relational (Singh 5). It is a perfect unity between self-luminosity and consciousness (*Prakasavimarsamaya*). Additionally, pure consciousness can create, preserve, and re-absorb all manifestations. “The Supreme, who is the agent of creation, is also the agent of maintenance and dissolution” (Bhatt 31). This consciousness is ineffable, omnipotent, omnipresent, and imperceptible. Moreover, it is always in eternal bliss and can be realised only through meditation and contemplation. It is also known as self-consciousness (*Chaitanya*), the Supreme experience (*Paramsamvid*), the Supreme bliss (*Paramsiva*), and the self (*Atman*) of everything.

The *Pratyabhijna Sastra* is called *Trika* philosophy, which gets its name from the three energies of *ParamSiva*. These three energies are *para*, *para para*, and *apara*, representing pure

consciousness, cognitive, and objective energy. According to the *Trika* philosophy, pure consciousness is the all-encompassing universal energy. The three energies represent the supreme, immediate, and inferior energy of the ultimate truth, ParamSiva. Additionally, the philosophy explains that the objective energy of the ultimate truth is manifested in the universe.

As individuals, our sense of self is deeply rooted in *Caitanya*. It is the objective energy of the ultimate truth that defines us. However, our innate ignorance (*Anava mala*) limits our potential for evolution. This ignorance narrows the scope of our pure consciousness by limiting our will (*Ichha Sakti*). It makes us experience separateness and assume a separate identity, causing us to be tossed around from one form of life to another. Despite the challenges posed by our inferior state of mind, we can evolve toward our subjective energy by tapping into our intermediate energy and achieving a higher level of consciousness.

A powerful force that lies dormant within everyone is the *kundalini*. It is an expression of immediate energy, known as *Sakti*. *Sakti* is the manifestation of the immediate energy of pure consciousness that reveals the world contained within itself. It is the kinetic aspect of consciousness that is created. "*Sakti*, thrown up by delight, lets herself go forth into manifestation" (Singh 10). The spiritual techniques called *upayas*, including *anavopaya*, *shaktopaya*, *sambhavopaya*, and *anupaya*, are meant to eliminate the impurities (*Malas*) to secure divine grace. As impurities are removed, an individual's veil is lifted, leading them to encounter the Ultimate Truth. The principle underlying *Pratyabhijna's* philosophy is to rise from an objective state of energy using intermediate energy to become one with the subjective energy of *Param Siva*. *Siva-Sakti* principle is the origin of all emanation.

Emancipation is to recognise one's essence. According to *Utpaldeva*, pure consciousness (*Akrtrimaahamvimarsa*) is "an instant awareness of one's true self, and its realisation leads to liberation (Singh 27). Liberation is consciousness reversal, the transformation of the self into pure consciousness. It is the accomplishment of *Siva* consciousness that reverberates throughout the entire cosmos. The perpetual joy that follows this experience is known as *cidananda* (Singh 28).

The goal of *Trika* philosophy is to help us understand the essential purpose of life. It guides us to overcome the state of entanglement with the world and the perpetual cycle of birth and death. Emancipation is a state of attainment of oneness with the ultimate truth of life. The *Trika* philosophy helps to overcome ignorance by emphasising the oneness of humanity in the ultimate truth. Also, it guides us to overcome self-imposed barriers of discrimination such as caste, creed, religion, and belief. It holds that every human has the potential to unlock the mystery of the Ultimate Truth through self-knowledge, leading to a state of enlightenment and the true purpose of human existence. Laleshwari, a medieval mystic, shared the notion of pure consciousness as the Ultimate truth (*Param Siva*) and her spiritual quest through her mystical poetry.

Laleshwari: A Saiva Mystic

Throughout history, Kashmir has been an abode of enlightened saints and mystics who were profoundly committed to their spiritual quest to attain oneness with the ultimate truth. Laleshwari (1320-1377) was a great *Saiva* mystic from medieval Kashmir, born into a Brahmin family and a proponent of Kashmir *Saivism*. Her first mention is in Mulla Ali Raina's *Tadhkirat-ul-Arifin* (1587), an account of saints from Kashmir (Bhat 30). As per custom, Laleshwari was married at a young age, but her husband and in-laws did not treat her well. As a yogini and a misfit for traditional household life, she embraced the life of a wandering ascetic and dedicated herself to spreading the message of the ultimate truth. Also, as a wandering preacher of the ultimate reality, she faced trials and tribulations at the hands of the public (Bhat 50). Laleshwari was a yogini and a wandering ascetic who was immersed in the light of herself. Despite facing trials and tribulations at the hands of the public, she remained steadfast in her devotion.

The poetry of Laleshwari can be classified as the initial poetic work in the *Koshur* language, spoken in Kashmir. Her mystical expressions are written in quatrains known as *vaakhs*, derived from the Sanskrit word *Vakiya*, meaning a sentence or spoken word (Hoskote xi). Laleshwari's poetry focuses on spirituality and imparts valuable lessons for those seeking self-discovery and the Ultimate Truth. *Vaakhs* offers insight into philosophical expositions of Kashmir *Saivism* and her spiritual

experience. She expounded the tenets of *Trika* philosophy in the vernacular, making it accessible to everyone. Her verses were passed down orally for generations until 1920 when *Lalla-vakhyani* was published by the Royal Asiatic Society London, the first authentic written document of her poetry.

Additionally, *vaakhs* are profound and comprehensive in meaning and purpose. The substance of the poetry deepens the passion for the spiritual journey and can assist devotees to gain spiritual heights. Lalleshwari's quatrains fall into three categories based on her comprehension and realisation of pure consciousness. Yogeshwari Bhatt, in *Shivayogini Lalleshwari*, posits that:

Some of her *vaakhs* highlight her spiritual enterprise (*Aprokshanubhuti*). A few of her *vaakhs* are a rich source of information (*Sadhakopadesh*) for the sincere seekers (*Mumukshu*). The last set of quatrains is for the general awareness of ordinary people (*Lokopadesh*). (80)

Lalleshwari toiled hard while seeking the divine until she unlocked the mystery of the Divine within her own heart (Hoskote 114). She advised sincere seekers to avail themselves of the opportunity to know the ultimate truth instead of being captivated by the world's enchantments. Her work highlights the importance of meditation, contemplation of the Divine, and advanced yogic practices. Moreover, it holds the potential to heal the sufferings of humanity. Lalleshwari wanted her fellow beings to truly realise the sacred purpose of human life by working judiciously for the enlightenment of self. Furthermore, the themes of divine love, self-knowledge, harmony, tolerance, and brotherhood abound in mystical poetry with the underlying notion of the Ultimate Truth.

Lalleshwari was a self-realized mystic who attained oneness with the Absolute truth. Kashmiri's poetry commences with her *vaakhs* that offer insights into the *Trika* school of thought. Her teachings are widely respected among Kashmiris, regardless of their religious beliefs. Many Muslim saint poets who hail from Kashmir acknowledged the philosophy of Lalleshwari resonating with Islamic monotheism. As she was affectionately known, Lal Ded encouraged people to understand the true nature of existence and attain emancipation while living (*Jivanmukta*). People of

all faiths have cherished her poetry, and she remains a beloved figure for her message of the Ultimate Truth.

Pure Consciousness: The Ultimate Truth in the Poetry of Laleshwari

Kashmiri poetry is a testament to the depth of its spiritual culture. During the medieval period, Laleshwari was one of the most notable figures in Kashmir *Saivism*, who used *vaakhs* to share her profound spiritual insights. Her poetry eloquently expresses the philosophy of pure consciousness as the Ultimate truth. In one of her verses, Laleshwari asserted that there is nothing beyond the Ultimate reality and expressed personal experience about the universal nature of pure consciousness. She acknowledged the divine attributes of omnipresence and omnipotence, reminding us of infinite power and the presence of the Ultimate Truth. Laleshwari affirmed:

You are sky and earth.

Day, wind-breath, and night,

You are grain, sandal paste, flowers, and water.

Substance of my offering, you who are All.

What shall I offer you? (Hoskote 64)

Laleshwari stated that the ultimate Truth is all-encompassing and present in every aspect of the universe. She taught that selfless devotion is far more valuable than any worldly offering we can make. Therefore, she said, “what shall I offer you?” Laleshwari recognised the pure consciousness that permeated the universe and referred to it as Siva. The description of Siva in the following lines embodies the essence of Kashmir *Saivism*, as it acknowledges Him as the creator of the cosmos, she said:

The sun rises, sets, rises again.

Shiva creates, destroys, and creates the world again. (Hoskote 136)

The notion of pure consciousness is the primary principle of manifestation (*Abhasavada*) (Singh 17). It is believed that the perpetually evolving appearances express the ultimate reality. Pure consciousness exhibits the object through its absolute will (Bhatt 483). N. K. Singh expands on this

concept in *Saivism in Kashmir*, stating that “I am the Lord (*Ishvara*) with the power and will to create the universe” (385).

Consciousness, often called the inner creative spark, is eternal and cannot be destroyed by the external events of life (Chaudhri 164). Laleshwari affirmed that the worshipper and the worshipped are not separate from each other as they are essentially one (Bhatt 31). The influence of the Ultimate truth can be found in everything around us, and an awakened individual can experience it. The symbolism of water transforming into ice or snow beautifully illustrates the concept of “Oneness.” Laleshwari explained that the manifestation is wholly merged into the ultimate reality, permeating everywhere. She shared the message that the whole creation is a representation of the creator, Siva, in the following verse:

Cold changes water into ice or snow.

Discernment shows the three different states

Are not different

When the sun of consciousness shines,

The plurality is dissolved into oneness.

The universe appears throughout, permeated with Siva. (Kak 100)

Pure consciousness is a state of perfection that surpasses words, thoughts, and the mudras of silence. Laleshwari emphasised the significance of human life as an opportunity to attain the highest stage of realising the Ultimate truth. Shiva cherishes the offering of knowledge of Self above all else. Her self-description reflects her spiritual quest as consciousness, representing her profound personal experience. Laleshwari motivated seekers to unravel the mystery of the Self by concentrating on their true selves:

The day passes into the night.

The earth reaches out for the sky.

On the day of the new moon,

The moon swallows Rahu.

Siva's worship is the realisation of the self as consciousness. (Kak 99)

In this world, suffering is an inevitable part of human existence. However, the teachings of the Vedas enjoin us to seek the counsel of a spiritual mentor who can guide us with wisdom and help us overcome our suffering. The guru always shares the message about the Ultimate truth, which can bring us peace and enlightenment. Laleshwari, for instance, trusted the words of her mentor and gained control over her mind with spiritual wisdom. She followed her mentor's advice sincerely and used her verses as a medium of guidance to conquer the inner darkness (Kak 134):

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 have danced naked. (Hoskote 97)

A guru is a faithful servitor of God. He leads sincere disciples out of the darkness of ignorance and assists in cultivating divine knowledge. Through the teachings of a spiritual mentor, humanity can escape the suffering caused by ignorance. Laleshwari, as a disciple, surrendered to the guru's instructions, who assisted her in decoding the spiritual life and comprehending the essence of pure consciousness. The guru's advice, 'forget the outside, get to the inside of things,' was helpful to Lal Ded. She practiced breath control, used the mantra of breathing to purify her inner self, and found her way to immortality. Her unwavering dedication to the proper path ultimately led her to enlightenment. Laleshwari remarked:

Impurities of my mind were wiped away as from a mirror

And I attained self-knowledge

I saw him near me-He is everything,

And I am nothing. (Kak 68)

Laleshwari explored the infinite nature of the self that liberated her from ignorance. Through her inward journey, she found that Siva permeates all and is the root cause of all (Kak 66).

Lalleshwari criticised the insignificant practices that do not contribute to the true purpose of life and rejected reading religious books without discernment (Kak18). Also, she equated religious preachers to a parrot chanting the holy name *Ram-Ram*. She believed taking control of one's senses was more important than praying lips and turning the rosary (Hoskote 140). Lalleshwari counseled the man not to please the stone god and questioned the priest-man about the object of his worship (Hoskote 60). She spoke out against the false notion of worship and called out preachers of religion as 'slaves of extremes' (Hoskote 84). Also, she believed practising moderate living was a key to understanding the truth. Lalleshwari versified:

Shiva lies in many places,

He does not know a Hindu from a Muslim.

The Self that lives in you and others

That is Shiva. Get the measure of Shiva. (Hoskote 106)

Lalleshwari treated everyone equally and associated with people of different castes. She was always willing to share food with people from all walks of life and encouraged others to do the same (Bhat 59). She emphasised the importance of breaking down societal barriers and recognising the interconnectedness of all living beings. According to Lalleshwari, *Siva* permeates every aspect of the physical world, and by cultivating self-knowledge, an individual can better understand and acknowledge the Ultimate Truth, which is essential for leading a fulfilled life (Kak 16).

Devotion is a noble path every religion emphasises, leading to an ocean of love. Consciousness is the highest form of awareness, revealing the ultimate truth underlying the cosmos. The universe is an arrangement of pure consciousness in a particular way. It means identities are not distinct, as everything is interconnected. Thus, the universe does not differ in identity from the Ultimate Truth (Chaudhri 99). It is a fundamental tenet of the non-dualistic tradition of Kashmir *Shaivism*. Henceforth, everything in the universe is only a form of pure consciousness, which is the Ultimate truth.

The history of Kashmir is filled with turbulence, yet it is also marked by remarkable saints who have left a lasting impact on the region. Laleshwari was a *Saiva* saint who witnessed some of the most tumultuous times in Kashmir. Despite the challenges she faced, Laleshwari was able to revolutionise the ethnic and cultural character of the region, even as new rulers enforced new faiths. Her ability to bring about significant change while respecting the underlying cultural structure of Kashmir is particularly noteworthy. She was able to exert a tremendous spiritual revolution against the brutal force of rulers who sought to change the Kashmiri ethos. Her spiritual wisdom, which many indigenous saints shared, can renew people's faith through piety and tolerance and enlighten them far above the self-created barriers that can divide humanity. As a humanist, Laleshwari preached a pure religious culture for Kashmir, one that was based on high moral values and endorsed communal harmony. She advocated for the masses to rise above the narrow bonds of religion and theology and to practice humanity. Her message is as relevant today as it was centuries ago, and her legacy lives on in the hearts of all who seek to build a more peaceful and just world, regardless of their background or beliefs.

J. L. Bhat, in *Lal-Ded Revisited*, shared thoughts of Pt. Anand Lal Kaul, who remarked *Vaakhs* of Laleshwari are simply pearls and diamonds and gems of the purest ray serene of Kashmir literature. They are current coins of quotations, a volume packed in a single saying. They touch Kashmiri's ear as well as the chord of his heart. They are freely quoted as maxims on appropriate occasions in conversation, having molded the national mind and set up a national ideal (31).

Conclusion

Kashmir is called *Resh-Vaer*, the Valley of Saints. Laleshwari, a yogini with spiritual insights, authored poems that sought to provide a purpose to life by referencing spirituality. Her *vaakhs* elucidated the terse principles of Kashmir *Saivism* in a manner understandable to the masses of her time and for generations to come. She posited that pure consciousness is the fountainhead of the universe and that self-realisation enables one to identify oneself with pure consciousness, leading to an immediate awareness of the Ultimate Truth. The veil of ignorance must be lifted to reveal a

person's true nature. At the individual level, human consciousness experiences the world as distinct from itself, and man's task is to reclaim pure consciousness, in which he is one with the Ultimate Truth. Laleshwari's spiritual accomplishment was that of a *jivanmukta* due to the dissolution of ego consciousness in the Ultimate Truth, resulting in her independence from external circumstances and her discovery of inner joy and happiness.

Consequently, reflecting on her experiences, everything appeared to Laleshwari as pure consciousness (*Siva Pramata*). This realisation led her to believe that the ultimate purpose of life is to pursue pure consciousness, to recognise the divine within all of us and merge with it, making life meaningful. The key to achieving this is to know oneself as "All the joy, all the love, all the peace, all the happiness we ever desired, is within us (Chaudhri 253) as pure consciousness, which is the Ultimate Truth."

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