



Representing Non-violence: The Corporal-Aesthetic Complex in the Poetic Philosophy of Lalla Ded

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Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate the position of the physical human body in Lalla Ded by employing an anthropological perspective. By studying the physical representation of the human body as a mode of aesthetic building, which may be thematically loaded, the paper attempts to base itself on how the human body has been and continues to be conceptualized, experienced, interacted with, and represented in various literary and cultural discourses. Considering these theoretical nuances, the paper reads the poetic philosophy of Lalleshwari (a 14th-century Kashmiri mystic) and tries to investigate the theme of non-violence as an aesthetic complex rooted in the corporal existence of a human being. The human body is a medium whose actions/behaviour/responses are a sum-up of various signals which may be psychological, physiological, or spiritual. This is the corporal representation of various feelings and phenomena in a human body/life. If happiness, anger, or sadness are taken as such signals which have a trigger within the biological/biochemical/psychological existence of a human being, so can be traced many other phenomena related to human life. One such important dimension is the notion of violence and non-violence; a notion which can be productive if tamed and destructive if let loose. Various philosophers and poets have showcased the various facets of violence and non-violence via human existence/acts. A seminal mystic Poetess Lalleshwari, who has made her body/acts and its mediated existence emblematic of such a form of non-violence, lived in Kashmir during the fourteenth century. Her mystic approach towards human life has demystified the existence of an individual; she depicts a corporal-aesthetic complex that is rooted in the philosophy of non-violence. Whether her Shaivite approach to life is taken into consideration her dialogue with the Sufis, or her Yogic exercises catch the attention of the reader, it is found that she sells the human body as a medium via which she displays the aesthetics which is rooted in non-violence.

Keywords: Lalleshwari, aesthetics, corporal, body, non-violence



Gender Equality

Article History: Received: 21 Feb 2024. Revised: 23 Jun 2024. Accepted: 03 Aug 2024. Published: 24 Nov 2024

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Citation: Ahmed, Jamiel & Feroz Ahmad Hakim. 2024. Representing Non-violence: The Corporal-Aesthetic Complex in the Poetic Philosophy of Lalla Ded. *Journal of South Asian Exchanges* 1.2

< <https://saexchanges.com/v1n1/v1n206.pdf> >

Introduction

Lalla Ded, also known as Lalleshwari or Lalla Arifa, is celebrated as a prominent mystic figure in the spiritual and cultural realms of Kashmir. Born in the mid-14th century within the socio-political landscape of Kashmir, Lalleshwari evolved as a profound voice of spirituality that transcended the confines of religious and societal norms (Edwardes 1925). Her poetic legacy, encapsulated in *Lalla vaakhs* not only bears witness to her deep spiritual insights but also her dedication to the principles of non-violence and universal brotherhood. Lalla Ded's teachings continue to inspire generations with their timeless wisdom and profound messages of love and compassion. Her emphasis on inner transformation and self-realization remains relevant in today's world, making her a revered figure in the history of Kashmiri literature, culture, and spirituality. Her words echo across time and space, resonating with all who seek a deeper connection with the divine. Lalla Ded's teachings remind us of the importance of looking within ourselves for true peace and understanding. Her legacy serves as a guiding light for those on a spiritual journey, illuminating the path toward enlightenment and inner harmony. In a world filled with chaos and turmoil, Lalla Ded's message of love and compassion is more relevant than ever, offering solace and inspiration to all who are willing to listen.

Rooted in the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition, Lalla's philosophy emerged as a bold challenge to the religious orthodoxy of her era. She championed a direct, personal communion with the divine, stepping away from the entrenched structures of institutionalized religion. Her verses articulate a non-dualistic perspective, blurring the lines between the self and the divine, and advocating for an inner journey towards spiritual enlightenment that champions unity and compassion (Edwardes 1925). Lalla Ded's teachings continue to resonate today, reminding us of the transformative power of love and empathy in a world often plagued by division and discord. Her message serves as a timeless reminder that true spiritual growth comes from within, through a deep connection with the universal energy that binds us all together. In a society where materialism and individualism often overshadow the importance of spiritual connection, Lalla Ded's words offer a refreshing alternative. By emphasizing the importance of looking inward and cultivating a sense of unity with all beings, her teachings provide a roadmap for personal growth and fulfillment. The centrality of her poetic energy within a social set-up can be aptly represented in the words of Martha Nussbaum, who says, "Narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction" (Nussbaum 1995). The same strain can be noticed in her poetry; she challenges us to transcend the limitations of our egos and embrace a more expansive understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. In a world that is increasingly fragmented and polarized, Lalla Ded's message of love and compassion serves as a beacon of hope, guiding us toward a more harmonious and peaceful existence.

The Poetic Philosophy of Lalla Ded

Lalla Ded's philosophical perspective is marked by a fervent quest for self-realization and an intimate communion with the divine. Eschewing the confines of religious

orthodoxy, she pursued a spiritual path that was both inclusive and universal in its appeal. Her teachings, as conveyed through her evocative poetry, advocate a non-dualistic view of existence, positing the ultimate reality as both immanent within the material world and transcendent beyond it (Hashmi 2022). Her emphasis on the unity of all beings and the interconnectedness of humanity resonates with readers across cultures and periods. Lalla Ded's enduring legacy lies in her ability to inspire individuals to seek inner peace and spiritual enlightenment through introspection and devotion. It is evident from the yogic philosophy of Lalla Ded that it is not only the body and its movements that define the life of a yogi, rather it is the spirit of such bodily movements which is equally important. Body/life becomes the medium via which a yogi aspires, and works out her/his journey from worldliness to Divinity. The human body becomes a vital link in such aspirations, and its existence in the practical world paves the path for achieving higher ideals. This research locates the position of human life/body in the mystic thought of Lalla Ded. This thematic link can be traced from the concept of "the return of the body" associated to the research work of Christoph Wulf. Regarding this, he writes, "Here the body—in parts—becomes the subject for historical/anthropological research. For example, the fragmentation process, religious and ritualistic practices with body parts, dismemberment of body parts and violence, gender-specific fetishes and eroticization of individual body parts become multiple foci of interest" (Wulf 2011). Such a theoretical understanding of the concept of the human body is crucial in studying various issues related to human culture. To highlight this crucial position of the human body in some vital areas of research, Christoph Wulf argues:

In view of the variety and richness of the research that has now become available—especially on the human body—it is possible to say that there is currently some agreement on the central meaning of body-images and body-concepts as cultural forms of identity and self-interpretation in European academia. The origin of the modern body in the west with its concomitant processes of distancing and disciplining, visualization of the inner self and self-observation, and keenness for knowledge and power has been explored in several ways, and have brought to the fore questions of dematerialisation, technolisation, fragmentation, sexuality and the performativity of the body. (Wulf, 2011)

Taking a cue from Wulf's theoretical insights, it is found that Lalla's message of love and compassion continues to inspire spiritual seekers to this day, reminding them of the importance of looking within for true fulfillment. The existence of Lalla Ded in the medieval socio-cultural set up of Kashmir and the reception of her mystic performance by the Kashmiri folk across ages highlights the centrality of the human life/body in such performances and receptions.

Lalla Ded's poetry serves as a timeless reminder of the universal truths that unite us all, regardless of our backgrounds or beliefs. Her poetry, rich in metaphors and symbols derived from the fabric of everyday life, serves as a conduit for expressing profound spiritual insights. This methodological approach rendered her teachings

accessible to a wide audience, cutting across the barriers of social and religious division. The verses of Lalla Ded frequently mirror a personal journey of inner metamorphosis, underscoring the significance of self-awareness and the eschewal of egoistic impulses in favor of a life marked by simplicity and devoutness (Edwardes 1925). Her words continue to resonate with readers today, offering timeless wisdom and guidance on navigating the complexities of existence.

Non-violence in Lalla Ded's Verses

In the light of Lalla Ded's poetic philosophy, the body is a microcosm or a mini-universe in which resides the omnipresent Lord Shiva. Representing this impression of the Divine in the human body, in *vaakh* 72 Lalla Ded narrates:

akuy Omkar yas nābi dare

He in whose navel constantly abides

none other than the One Omkar,

Who builds a bridge between his own

and Cosmic Consciousness,

By making mind one with this mighty spell—

What need has he for a thousand other spells? (Kaul, 1973)

The human life/human body becomes both a central concern as well as a central symbol in Lalla *vaakhs*. She employs the images of various organs and functions of the body to bring home her universal messages of hope, love, peace, syncretism, harmony, non-violence, and tolerance. The principle of non-violence (*Ahimsa*), through which Lalla Ded conveys a vision of peace and compassion firmly rooted in the recognition of the inherent unity of all existence, is profoundly recognisable in her teachings. Her philosophical stance posits that a true spiritual awakening is contingent upon realizing this unity, which naturally fosters the principles of non-violence (Gadon 2003). Through her poetry, Lalla Ded inspires readers to embrace kindness and respect, ultimately leading to a more compassionate and understanding society. Taking upon bigotry on the basis of religion, she is of the view that humans are equal and there can be no discrimination on religious basis. Shiva, the God, resides in all his creation, so how can we categorize these as superior and inferior. Lalla Ded does not hesitate to say that harmony, syncretism, and equality depict the identity of God, and if an individual aspires to reach the Divine it is mandatory to have an understanding of these insights. Lalla Ded expresses this syncretic message in *vaakh* 57 as:

Shiv chuy thali thali rozān

Siva abides in all that is, everywhere;

Then do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Musalman.

If thou art wise, know thyself;

That is the true knowledge of the Lord. (Kaul, 1973)

The mantra of equality and harmony runs all across Lalla Ded's poetic philosophy, she raises voice against any sort of discrimination between people.

Lalla Ded praises the winning-power of human patience and expresses it by contrasting patience against "lightning and thunder", "darkness at noon", and "a

grinding mill". The crux of this thought is that patience is a winning solution for all the struggles of life; Lalla expresses this in *vaakh* 28 as:

tsālun chu vuzmala ta tratay
Patience to endure lightning and thunder,
Patience to face darkness at noon,
Patience to go through a grinding-mill—
Be patient whatever befalls, doubting not
that He will surely come to you. (Kaul, 1973)

One of her verses eloquently states, "We are not separate from the world, nor is the world separate from us; when we attain inner harmony, we see this unity everywhere." This particular verse not only illuminates her non-dualistic worldview but also emphasizes the critical role of inner peace as the cornerstone for fostering external non-violence (Khan 2010). Lalla Ded's message of interconnectedness highlights the importance of recognizing our connection to all beings and the environment. By cultivating inner harmony, individuals can contribute to creating a more peaceful and compassionate world for future generations. Lalla Ded's teachings also serve as a reminder that our actions and thoughts have a ripple effect on the world around us, emphasizing the need for mindfulness and compassion in all aspects of life. By acknowledging our interconnectedness, we can cultivate a sense of responsibility towards not only ourselves but towards all living beings. Through inner peace and harmony, we can strive towards creating a more harmonious and loving world for all.

The Corporal-Aesthetic Complex

The synthesis of the corporeal aesthetics within Lalla Ded's poetry marks a unique facet of her spiritual and philosophical articulation. Her poetic philosophy seems to echo the notes of Derrida, wherein he says, "The pursuit of beauty, in its highest form, is an act of resistance against the violence of the world" (Derrida, 1992). Her verses are rich with vivid imagery and metaphors that draw from the physicality of the body and the natural world, serving as allegories to illuminate spiritual verities. This melding of aesthetic beauty with bodily experiences in her poetic narrative acts as a potent medium for communicating her ethos of non-violence and compassion (Bazaz 2022). Through this complex interplay of the corporeal and the aesthetic, Lalla Ded's poetry transcends mere words on a page to become a transformative experience for readers, inviting them to contemplate the interconnectedness of all existence. By embodying her teachings in such a visceral and evocative manner, Lalla Ded's work continues to inspire individuals towards creating a harmonious and loving world for all. Her ability to merge the physical and spiritual realms in her poetry allows readers to connect on a deeper level with her message of unity and peace. The vivid imagery she employs creates a sensory experience that resonates with the reader long after the words have been read. In a world filled with conflict and division, Lalla's poetry serves as a beacon of hope, reminding us of the power of love and compassion to bring about positive change.

Lalla's poetry, through its intricate use of language and symbolism, bridges the tangible and the transcendent, offering insights into the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms. Her ability to weave together the aesthetic and the corporeal not only enriches the sensory experience of her poetry but also deepens the philosophical underpinnings of her teachings, highlighting the inseparability of beauty, truth, and ethical living (Accardi, 2018). Lalla Ded's work continues to inspire readers across generations, serving as a timeless reminder of the enduring power of art and wisdom. Her poetry invites us to reflect on the universal themes of humanity and spirituality, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and empathy among individuals. Her words resonate with a profound sense of introspection and self-discovery, urging readers to look within themselves and confront their own inner struggles and desires. Through her timeless verses, Lalla Ded encourages us to seek a deeper understanding of the human experience and our place within the universe, ultimately guiding us towards a more compassionate and enlightened way of being. In a world filled with chaos and uncertainty, her poetry remains a beacon of light, offering solace and inspiration to all who seek wisdom and truth.

Lalla's Influence on Kashmiri Society

The philosophical teachings of Lalla Ded have profoundly influenced the socio-cultural landscape of Kashmir, moulding a collective identity that cherishes tolerance, peace, and unity. Her verses have become a beacon of hope, promoting a vision of coexistence and mutual respect among Kashmir's diverse religious and ethnic groups, even against a backdrop of historical conflicts (Edwardes, 1925). Her poetry continues to resonate with Kashmiris today, reminding them of the importance of compassion and understanding in a region often marked by division and strife. Lalla Ded's legacy serves as a reminder of the power of literature to transcend boundaries and bring people together in harmony. Her words have inspired generations to strive for a more harmonious society, where differences are celebrated rather than feared. Lalla Ded's message of love and acceptance continues to be a guiding light for those seeking peace in a turbulent world. Through her poetry, she has left a lasting impact on Kashmiri culture, reminding us all of the beauty that can emerge from unity and understanding.

Lalla Ded's impact transcends the spiritual domain, permeating literature, art, and social discourse. Her legacy stands as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of her non-violent philosophy, nurturing a culture of peace and understanding within the Kashmiri society. Her teachings emphasize the importance of compassion, empathy, and unity, inspiring generations to strive for harmony and coexistence. Lalla Ded's timeless wisdom serves as a beacon of hope in times of conflict and division, encouraging individuals to embrace diversity and build bridges across divides. Her poetry continues to be celebrated and studied, resonating with readers around the world for its profound insights and universal truths. Through her words, Lalla continues to challenge societal norms and promote a message of love and

acceptance. Her enduring legacy reminds us of the power of individual action in creating positive change and fostering a more peaceful world for all.

Comparative Analysis

Lalla Ded's philosophy of non-violence shares common ground with other non-violent movements and philosophies across various cultures and epochs, yet it stands out due to its unique integration with a non-dualistic spiritual worldview. The principles of *Ahimsa* in Jainism, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on non-violence, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership in the civil rights movement all underscore the transformative power of non-violence in achieving social and spiritual change (Mishra, 2023). However, Lalla's approach distinguishes itself by weaving non-violence into the fabric of a non-dualistic understanding of existence, offering a distinct perspective on the universal pursuit of peace and unity. Lalla Ded's teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of compassion towards not only humans but all living creatures, highlighting the profound impact of non-violence on both individual and collective well-being. This holistic approach to non-violence challenges conventional dualistic thinking and offers a profound insight into the interconnected nature of existence. By recognizing the inherent interconnectedness of all beings, Lalla Ded's teachings inspire individuals to cultivate empathy and understanding towards others, fostering a sense of unity and harmony within society. This shift in perspective encourages individuals to consider the welfare of all living creatures, promoting a more compassionate and inclusive approach to relationships and interactions. Ultimately, Lalla Ded's philosophy of non-violence serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of love and compassion in creating a more peaceful and harmonious world for all.

This comparative analysis highlights the shared emphasis on non-violence as a foundational principle for social and spiritual transformation across different traditions. Lalla Ded's teachings, while resonating with these global philosophies, contribute a unique voice to the chorus, advocating for a realization of oneness that naturally fosters non-violent living (Maralov, 2019). By emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of selfless love, Lalla Ded's teachings offer a profound perspective on the power of non-violence in shaping individual and collective consciousness. Through her poetry and philosophy, she inspires a deeper understanding of the transformative potential inherent in embracing non-violence as a way of life. Her message echoes across time and space, reminding us of the inherent compassion and empathy that lies within each of us. As we strive to embody her teachings, we are challenged to confront our own biases and prejudices, and to cultivate a sense of unity with all living beings. In doing so, we can pave the way for a more peaceful and harmonious world, where violence has no place and love reigns supreme. Gandhi's legacy serves as a guiding light for those seeking to create positive change in the world. By following in her footsteps, we can work towards a future where peace and understanding prevail.

Conclusion

Lalla Ded's poetic philosophy articulates a profound vision of non-violence, spirituality, and unity, holding significant relevance for contemporary dialogues on peace and conflict resolution. Her teachings, deeply entrenched in the rich cultural and spiritual tapestry of Kashmir, provide insightful perspectives on the application of non-violence as a catalyst for both personal and societal transformation. The potential for future research to delve into the application of Lalla Ded's philosophy within the realm of contemporary non-violent activism is vast, offering a conduit between the ancient wisdom she embodies and the ongoing global pursuit of peace and justice (Franke 2014). By examining Lalla Ded's teachings in the context of modern conflicts, scholars can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of non-violent approaches in resolving complex issues. This exploration can contribute to a deeper understanding of how ancient wisdom can inform and inspire contemporary efforts towards peace-building and conflict resolution. Ultimately, Lalla Ded's philosophy emphasizes the power of love, compassion, and forgiveness as tools for creating lasting peace. Her teachings highlight the importance of inner transformation and self-awareness in order to bring about positive change in the world. By connecting her timeless wisdom to current global challenges, activists and scholars can work towards promoting a more peaceful and just society for future generations. Lalla's teachings also underscore the significance of empathy and unity in fostering harmonious relationships among individuals and communities. By incorporating her principles into modern peace-building practices, we can strive towards a more inclusive and compassionate world where conflicts are resolved through dialogue and understanding. Through Lalla Ded's teachings, we can learn to approach conflicts with an open heart and mind, seeking to understand the perspectives of others and find common ground. Her emphasis on empathy and unity serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of compassion in building bridges between people from different backgrounds and beliefs. By embodying these values in our daily interactions and advocating for them in our communities, we can contribute to creating a more harmonious and interconnected world where peace and justice prevail.

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