

LALLA'S VOICES OF THE EVERYDAY WILD:
A Brief Introduction to the Translations

The Hindus say she is one of them.
The Muslims claim that she belongs to them.
In truth, she is from among those close to God.

Pir Ghulam Hasan, *Tārīkh-i Hasan*, 1885, speaking of Lal Ded.

Do not send to know one
as Hindu, as Muslim.
You are,
are you
not,
wise?
Then know your self.

From an utterance ascribed to Lal Ded, speaking to us all.

Dear Reader,

Here are a few, very few, of the verses of Lal Ded, who flourished in Kashmir in the long, dynamic fourteenth century of that valley, who chanted threshold-crossing verse in Kashmiri, the mother tongue of its inhabitants, directly and darkly eloquent, charting new imaginative landscapes for persons and place – the first true and extended use of the language we know today as Kashmiri. In more ways than one, Lal Ded is the first name among the visionary company of poets in Kashmir.

Lal Ded is recalled as both ascetic teacher and poet among those communities who have preserved her words for us; her sayings, possessed by memory for the most part until very recently, when the ink of print began to blot out memory, are still a compass by which many Kashmiris continue to orient their lives. Indeed, some of her words survive as proverbs, part of the now anonymous fund of Kashmiri wisdom; hand in glove with such memory of an exemplary life and mind is the fact that the astonishing range of voicing, register, tone and imagery of her verses, recognized as such, continue to provide a touchstone for the modern Kashmiri poetic voice and line.

Kashmir is itself refigured in her words, as in the line from a verse translated in full in the selection below:

I have seen...

A waste of water, once, that was a bridge
From Crescent Face to Footprint Lake
that was the flowing world

That is, in its way, as fine a map to the valley of Kashmir as one could ask for, from Mount Harmukh in the North to Lake Konsar in the South. Because of the pun between *sum sār* which is printed, meaning a lake that was a bridge, and *saṁ-sār*, which can be heard in the echoes of the printed word, meaning the flowing (Sanskrit, *sār*) world of lives subjected to repeated birth and death, the valley itself becomes the embodied time of our place, a world.¹ Embodied, partly because the peak is imagined to be the crowned head of Shiva, and the Lake, by legend and name in Sanskrit, is the footprint of Vishnu, whose giant strides measured out and so brought the world into being. But the pun allows us to see in this a further sense. The world the valley has become is a human world, in the etymological sense of that word, being the time of man – a fluid and thickly crowded space of lives lived with others, a valley that is not just given to us as present about us in the environment, an accomplished fact, but one which is formed of the co-incidence at times of the past and present which constitute persons. Yet we are not to lose sight of the simultaneously narrated story of the gods either – our world, the space opened up for us, is in part the achievement of the gods, but it is a space now vacated of the gods (as persons), for they have entered into the very fabric of the environment, if the environment is stubbornly construed to be the world about us alone. Of the world when viewed as a fold of mind and environment, well, that is a different matter. And it is just such a story Lalla’s verses gives us to overhear.

This one line in which the valley of Kashmir is reimagined is then a fine enactment of Lalla’s poetics, which speaking in terms of theology and aesthetics, walks a newly charted threshold of self-assertion in the pursuit of knowledge of the self. In her words, we find an idiomatic Kashmiri stridently and not self-consciously used, albeit with the long history of Sanskrit and Persian poetics and theology clearly in the horizons of the remembered Lal Ded. But such contexts do not explain her away, nor do they contain her.

At times, the valley that was her own is lifted out into the realm of allegory, as when Babā Dāwūd Mishkāti, in his *Secrets of the Pious* (*Asrār ul-Abrār*, written in 1654), said of her that “she knew the path through the valley of the real”, the kind of valley charted by Persian masters before Lalla. But what enables Lalla’s multilingual fluency, and free passage through traditions and their landscapes without confinement to fixed allegorical codes or devices, is Kashmiri – the invention in Kashmiri of a medium that is tough, epigrammatic and lyrical, and the invention of a person in whose distinctive movements of thought and vision the Kashmiri records for us a new way of being persons. Her meanings and syntax model and mould the movements of thought (and emotions) of persons in Kashmiri to this day. And her valley is more or less still the valley of those who sing her words, whether they continue to reside there, or reach for it more tenuously, seeking to cross the mountains with their ears.

¹ For emphasizing this I am grateful to my mother, Saroj Malla, who chanted, read and re-read, and again chanted this *vākh* with me, refusing to allow me to fool myself into thinking that one could possess the verse until it had seized one through memory.

Of a Persona and Voice

It is easiest to meet Lal Ded by hearing her own voice, and encountering her words, styled in Kashmiri as *vākh*, which is not word or saying alone, but also an utterance – a creature of a speaker’s voice when the speaker is no fiction, but a person. A *vākh* consists most commonly in four feet, with each foot receiving four stresses.

Despite the small compass, and largely because of Lalla’s diction, thought and the suppleness of her syntax, Lalla’s utterances are never dull, repetitive, and miraculously, given the possible overtones of ‘instruction’ in *vākh*, Lalla’s verses are never merely didactic.² To adapt an image used of Lalla by the contemporary poet and critic Rahman Rahi, each foot in the four-foot utterance glows, a living ember when compared with the dead ash of quantitative meter, and the dying sparks therein of automatic speech.³ Among her earliest translators into English said of her that her words glowed “with the red fire of a thought that burns.” It is her thought with which a translator must conjure new fire in English.

Consider the last two feet of a four-line stanza, first in Kashmiri (however mangled in transliteration), and then ferried across into English:

sāreniy padan kunuy wakhun pyōm
Lali me trāg gōm laga kami shāṭhay?

In all my footsore verse, a single story has befallen me:
I, Lalla, am on a lake – on what bank shall I run aground?

² There is for future scholarship the matter of what may be termed ‘the scene of instruction’ to be taken into account when outlining the deep contexts for the Kashmiri *vākh*, for ‘vacana’ is also commonly enough in Kashmiri Sanskrit (as indeed elsewhere) as an oral instruction, communicated by a teacher to a student in dialogue, as it is with Sāhib Kaul as late as the seventeenth century in Kashmir. In verse five of Sāhib Kaul’s *Citsphārasārādvaya*, a teacher tells a student that though the lotus which is the student’s mind has broken through the mud, it has not yet blossomed – but the touch of the teacher’s *utterances* like the many-fingered rays of the sun (*madvacanaprabhākarasparśah*), will do the trick as far as minds like closed lotuses are concerned. There is evidence that Lalla did indeed think of ‘vākhs’ with such scenes of instruction in mind, though the scene has been internalized, and the words styled also as first-person exclamations, and not alone third- or even second person imperatives. (I am indebted to Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry and Prayer: Stotras in the Religious and Literary History of Kashmir*, (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2013), 145. Cf. this verse of Lalla’s: The teacher uttered only a single teaching (*vākh*): / From without, he said, enter in; / that to me, Lalla, has become living word and word to live by (*vākh ta watsun*) / That is why, naked, I began to dance.”

³ Rahman Rahi was distinguishing the *vākh* of Lalla from the *śrukḥ* of her younger contemporary, Sheikh Nūr ud-dīn, when he distinguished a poetics of ‘live embers’ from ‘sparks in dying ash’. (*Koshur Shiraza*, vol 3., no.1, (J & K Academy, 1966), 10-16; translated by Jayalal Kaul, in K. Santhanam (ed.), *An Anthology of Indian Literatures*, (Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1969).

Students of Indic poetry can expect the pun on the word “*pad*”, which literally is “foot”, but as in English, it is also a foot of verse (and at times, the entire verse itself). Thus, “In all my verses, the journeys, the steps, or the events of my life, a single memorable thing has befallen me.” That is a fitting line for a persona who has never been institutionalized – there are no sects of devotees to Lalla, no tradition with well-defined sociological markers that has come up in her name.⁴ There is, fittingly enough, no grave for pilgrims to journey to, and no place associated with her final acts. She lives, where she lives, in and through her words alone – not even biographies composed for her later, or anecdotes in her name, take precedence over her own verses. There is no life of Lalla outside the living utterances. And among these, she says, there is only one thing worth narrating:

In all my footsore verse, a single story has befallen me.

The line seems innocuous, perhaps, until we realize we are dealing with a trope for a trope – for she has made of a trope – the lake in which she is now trying to find her feet – an event, something which can befall you. And “befallen” is exactly what the Kashmiri says, falling in at the last, receiving appropriate stress.

You might think she was addressing you, her anticipated auditors, until the next line announces her distance from us. The plea in the closing question reveals the space for personhood, the world enough and time she has found within herself, where she is become every bit as enigmatic as her words.

The clause “*me trāg gom*” is considerably more stark and disquieting than the weak English line “I happened on a lake, am set adrift, etc.” might suggest; and the space opened up by the metaphors of the lake – a circumscribed yet indefinitely located place, given the indistinct shores – reveals that Lalla herself is the only possible context for resolving the question her quests have made of her. The metaphorology of

⁴ Perhaps it is better to stress that I mean to say that no *institutionalized* memory of her exists, for there are local notices of practices and beliefs associated with places associated with Lalla. Professor Mohammad Ishaq Khan writes in a footnote: “Neither does there exist any grave or samādhi of Lal Ded in Kashmir. Of course, a tomb supposed to be the burial place of Lal Ded, situated in the vicinity of the shrine of Baba Nasibu’d Din Ghazi in the town of Bijbehara is an object of veneration for a small number of Muslim women. What, however, needs to be emphasized is that none of the Muslim admirers of Lal Ded has mentioned her tomb in the *tazkira* [historical] literature.” See his “The Rishi Tradition and the Construction of Kashmiriyat,” in Imtiaz Ahmed and Helmut Reifield, (eds.), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, (New Delhi: 2004), 61-82; n9, 71. Another notice is worth recounting. Anand Koul who wrote a study of Lalla in the 1930s (*Lalla Yogīshwarī* (sic)), noted a common belief in a local pond being *Lalla’s pond*, (*Lalla trāg*), a reference to a legend concerning Lalla and her husband, who suspecting her of infidelity broke a water pitcher she brought back with her from the river bank where she would meditate for long hours. The water kept its shape above her head, despite the pot breaking into pieces. There was water to spare after Lalla had filled all the vessels in the house, and the water left over became a pond. That a place should have been associated with her even in the 1960s is curious, given that Pir Ghulam Hasan thought it went dry in 1925. For the ethnographic reports and historical notices, see Jayalal Koul, *Lal Ded*, (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1973), 12.

lakes (and not night-blind talk of oceanic waters) are *not* an appeal to a mystical boundlessness, or to featureless plenitude: the lake, circumscribed, yet indefinite, is an unquiet way to figure the nature of orientation and personhood. But more on lakes below.

I have allowed the English “run aground”, with its plodding echo of “feet” in “run”, to fill in a semantic echo of “happen upon, befall” in “*lagun*”, which literally means “to join up, or connect with” and, in this context, “to come to anchor, and thus run aground”. The last line has a curious movement of the consonants *ga*, *la* and *ma* across the syntactic break of the second line, echoing in the words “lake”, “happened upon”, and “run aground”. I have tried eliciting the syntactic break with a hyphen, underscoring the phonetic continuity with a line:

Lali, me trag gom—lagay kami shāthay?

(Word for word:)

Lalla / I/ lake/ happened [to me] will run aground / what / bank?

The effect is a moving one. It is as though the line itself seeks assurance of connection between clauses, between her condition and her aspiration in the threaded sounds before running out of a phonetic anchor at the close. The line leaves us with a question and an abrupt-sounding word for a sand bank to a river, interrupting all the water-smooth syllables thus far. How appropriate that the word for a sand bank should hover like this in the memory, an ungrounded emblem for finding one’s feet. A bank, I should point out (as the dictionaries do for this word in Kashmiri), is often closer to a rower or swimmer on the waters than they might think, and in one sense, not discerned as such till he or she runs up against it. It is not where one’s eyes come to rest.

Importantly, the metaphor of a person on a boat, or a person casting about in the water directly, in such a line as this, asks of us to suspend our visual intelligence to allow the phonetics of the verse to make their claim on us, in the modulated sound of watery syllables, the spilling connections, and the abrupt closure, which signals not safety, but the sudden suspension of hope in the question cast out before us, suspended still for all auditors. These are fiercely intelligent lines, I think you will agree.

Let us consider the resources of her epigrammatic style more generally. Each foot in Lal Ded’s *vākh* has four stresses to the line, but even in our truncated example, we can see the variation a line can sustain: the first line is a single sentence, while the second line has two, the twist begging for a hyphen or colon in English. Everything in this verse is reminiscent of the muscular resources of living prose rather than court-sponsored verse in a long-cultivated literary language like Sanskrit or Persian. The latter have been found, with some exaggeration, but also justice, to be twice removed from first-person-personal language—once, by explicitly being the expression of stereotyped literary personas, and not persons; and secondly, by obeying the rhetorical demands of ornament rather than the rhythms of speech.

I am not saying that Lalla’s verses count as prose, or free verse (whatever that unhappy phrase could mean). There is that careful control of the stress, and the dense

texture of alliteration and rhyme within and across feet. There is a peculiar concentration of thought as is only possible in lyric; but there is yet a living syntax, the movement of speech attuned to speaking breath. There is also the person directly, “I, Lalla”, who announces herself in a challenging metaphorical landscape that is very different from the world of cultivated, expected similes we meet in high literature in Sanskrit or Persian.⁵ It is not *as if* she were on a lake: Lalla says she is, and says it largely to herself, that I, Lalla, *am* on a lake. And this is the single story that has happened to her, in all her verse. We do not need Lalla herself to tell us, as she does elsewhere, that we ought to consider the mind alone to be a lake. We know we are dealing with environments of a very special kind.

Her landscapes, as indeed her persona, can be at once disarmingly quotidian and alarmingly exotic. They will make strange and familiar both our surroundings and ourselves. The environments about us, and within us, cross one another in Lalla’s words, and such crossings, acutely observed in a variety of moods, are one of Lalla’s gifts to poetry. These obey no fixed form, nor literary code, but are, in the words of Wallace Stevens, “migratory passings to and fro” between the inner and outer landscapes – an art form of their own.

I choose this half-verse not only because it offers us a fine example of Lal Ded’s style, or her persona, but also because it announces one of the most important tropes in her corpus – the waters, whose shores are indistinct, translated weakly here as “lake”. This image is everywhere with Lal Ded, a threshold trope which announces not only her conviction in limit-experiences, but which can also be heard in places as a master trope – the indefinite waters, often dark, with indefinite boundaries, calling into question any metaphor of places circumscribed, or experience phenomenologically situated within habitual horizons. There is, at times, life in waters, but more often than not, there is the freedom of dying while alive, the death of a self constituted not out of knowledge, but brute habit.

It is not for nothing that the most important of Lal Ded’s verbs are “*mīlith*”, “blended-in, absorbed”, and “*tsrath*”, a verb for the distinct way in which water falls on water, like rain on the surface of a lake, or sheets of water folding in with water on the surface of a lake at tide. Sometimes she is lost on these waters; sometimes she is lost on the shore; sometimes the waters are a memory; sometimes she seeks them out,

⁵ In a comparative vein, see A. K. Ramanujan’s discussion of the prose characteristics of the Kannada ‘*vacana*’, (like the Kashmiri *vākh*, a word derived from the Sanskrit root “*vac*,” and meaning ‘saying’ or ‘utterance’): *Speaking of Shiva*, (Penguin Books, New York, 1973), 20-21. As Ramanujan reports of the meterless meter of the Kannada ‘*vacana*’ that it has emerged from a folk metrical form, *the tripādi*, the Kashmiri *vākh* may have its roots in a widely distributed quantitatively structured song called the *doha*. What cannot, however, be gainsaid is the distinctive emphasis placed on the *act* of speaking in both South and Kashmirian tradition: the Tamil poet-saint Nammālvār styled his poems ‘*tiru-vāy-mōli*’, ‘holy-mouth utterances’, or ‘divine utterances’; Māṇikkavācakar called his body of poems *tiruvācakam*, ‘the holy utterance’; and the Vīraśaiva saints in Kannada styled their words as *vacana*, as we have seen. This emphasis underscores the shift in attention from the addressee of the poem, or the target of faith, to the speaking subject.

merging with them, drowning. Sometimes the waters yield, sometimes they are obdurate, hard if transparent, like crystal. However it may be with her on the waters, Lalla allows us to overhear her speaking and listening to herself.

I have, therefore, here sought to introduce the reader to poems which are characteristic of a range of Lalla's aesthetic techniques, signaled by the signature phrase "I, Lalla". I have tried to organize this selection in part by the trope of the waters. For ultimately it is the free invention of herself, of a persona called Lalla, who speaks as a person, who doubts, celebrates, inveighs against, enjoins us, censures us and more, that is her most lasting invention.⁶

Of the Person and Her Words

Of Lal Ded herself as a historical person I am tempted to say very little. There is no documented mention of Lal Ded until the seventeenth century,⁷ nor any attempt to allow the contours of her biography to interpret the body of her work until then. As it stands, I believe there is no truly independent context one can provide that is

⁶ The invention, in vernacular languages, of a literary and religious form of personhood directly expressed in speech other than Sanskrit has a long history, to be sure. See the classic, V. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators: the Saint-Singers of India*, (Delhi, 1966); see also the excellent introduction to the great linguistic and practical shift in practices of the self that began in the subcontinent in vernacular languages from the ninth century in the afterword to A. K. Ramanujan, *Nammalvar: Hymns for the Drowning*, (Penguin, 1993).

⁷ The distinction, I believe, goes to Bābā Dāwūd Mishkāti's *Asrār ul-Abrār*, written in 1654. Khwāja Muhammad 'Azam Dedmari's *Wāqī 'āti Kashmir*, from 1746, accounts her a saint, and offers the fourteenth century as her time. In general, the eighteenth century in Persian chronicles is a good century for Lalla. She is noticed in Abdul Wahāb Shāyiq's *Tarikhi Shāyiq* (1754-62), and in Muhammad Aslam Abu-al Qāsim's *Gauhari Ālam* in 1785. All of the historical notices of her are in Persian, and the vast majority from authors writing within Sufi, or more broadly, Islamicate traditions. But poets in Kashmiri in the eighteenth century, such as the long suffering Arnimal, and before, the venerated Rūpa Bhavani and before her, Nūr-ud Dīn, know, echo and venerate Lal Ded. It is however to Sanskrit that one must look for the first translation (and as such, the first study) of Lal Ded. Paṇḍit Rājānaka Bhāskara, the erudite student of Shaiva and Kashmirian philosophy and theology, for reasons that are not known to me at present, transcribed and translated and annotated almost forty of Lal Ded's verses in the eighteenth century. His work has considerably influenced my own presentation here. See *Lalleśvarīvākyaṇi*, (Srinagar, India: Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, 1919). It is surely not without interest to note that at the same time, Baba Mohammad Kamal translated the Kashmiri verses of Lalla's younger contemporary, Nūr ud-dīn into Persian. There is much more to say about the attention paid to vernacular thought and poetry by classically trained scholars in Sanskrit and Persian at this time in Kashmir.

antecedent to the evidence of her own voice preserved for us in a living tradition that to this day recalls, records and reliably transmits somewhere between seventy and one hundred and forty verses in her name.

In her many names, I should say. She is Lal Ded in Kashmiri, an affectionate name meaning “Grandmother Lal”, which some have interpreted to mean, and again with affection, as “Grandmother Belly”.⁸ Sometimes she is Lalleśvari, the inspired, almost divine Lady Lalla, to Hindu speakers of Kashmiri; she is at times Lalla ‘Ārifa (Lalla the Gnostic, the knower of what is real) to Muslim speakers of Kashmiri. Since at least since the end of the nineteenth century, she has been known as a second Rabi’a of Basra.⁹ She has also been known as Lalla the Mother and Mad Lalla (*Maej Lalla* and *Lalla Mot* in Kashmiri, respectively); perhaps most intriguingly, Bābā Dāwūd knew her as *Majnūn-i ‘Āqila*, a deliciously ambiguous phrase in Persian, meaning either one who kept her wits about her in the madness of her total loving absorption of God, a reasonable gnostic or a knower, but with a touch of madness about her.

She is always an exemplary quester after knowledge of the self.

Students interested in the sources for the legend of Lalla as it was recounted in the late nineteenth, and even up to our own century, are advised to pick up Jayalal Kaul’s *Lal Ded*.¹⁰ Rather than offer what must surely in the end be a tendentious biography here, I would like to consider a perspective offered by the poet and translator of Lal Ded, Ranjit Hoskote. Hoskote suggests that what our existing evidence (that is, the verses themselves, and the poetic echoes in later authors, stories, legends and historical notices) brings into view is not the words of a single author alone, but is instead what Hoskote calls “a contributory lineage”. He goes on to

⁸ Students of South Asian poetics and religion would do well to compare Lal Ded’s biographies and poems with that of her predecessor in vernacular poetry, Mahādēvī, the twelfth century poet and saint who sang in Kannada, and associated with the Holy Mountain in Andhra (Śrīsailam). She was affectionately known as Akkama, meaning ‘elder respected sister’ in Kannada. See A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva*, (Penguin Books, New York, 1973), 93-124. The coincidences in poetics and reported persona are too striking for any student to ignore.

⁹ Pīr Ghulām Hasan calls her not only Lalla ‘Ārifa, but a second Rabi’a in his *Tārīkh-i Hasan*; this is an honorable comparison, a designation repeated by Hāji Mohi-ud-dīn Miskīn, in his *Tārīkhī Kabīr* in 1909. Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya of Basra (d.801) being the first woman mystic in Islam, who earned through her virtue and knowledge a special place ‘in the company of men’. Students of comparative poetics and religion would do well to follow this comparison, surely an attempt by Pīr Gulam Hasan to provide a critical context for the reception of Lalla in Islamicate traditions. For stories and the words of Rabi’a, see Paul Lossensky’s translation of ‘Attar’s biography of her in his *Memorial of the Friends of God*, in Michael Sells (ed.), *Early Islamic Mysticism*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1996), 155-170. Her words in dialogue, with their trademark intimacy and expression of a fiercely independent persona, indeed show much that may with profit broadly speaking contextualize Lalla’s style. Consider Rabi’a saying to God: “My God, I am sore at heart. Where will I go? I am a clod of earth, and that house a rock. I must have you.”

¹⁰ Jayalal Kaul, *Lal Ded*, (Sahitya Akedemi, New Delhi, 1973).

describe this as a living archive of traditions of Lalla’s verses, further glossed as “a sequence of assemblies comprising people of varied religious affiliations and both genders, representing the experience of various age groups and social locutions, including both literate and unlettered, reciters and scribes, redactors and commentators.”¹¹

In light of this, I would ask you to consider the way in which my translations into English have reached you. I have used verses taken from an edition prepared by the inimitable Georg Grierson in 1914 in the following way.¹² A local scholar, Mukunda Rāma Shāstrī, at the bequest of Grierson, looked but could not locate a manuscript of Lalla’s verses, despite the fact that there was word of some privately owned family manuscripts. But Mukunda Rāma found something else – a venerable reciter named Dharmadāsa Darwesh of the village of Gush. This person was trained to recite a body of verses recalled as Lalla’s as part of a long family tradition, a practice that makes of Lalla’s words something close to scripture, if that latter word were quite applicable here.

Grierson used this very local tradition of Lalla’s words, embodied in the trained memory of a single reciter (albeit embodying a genealogy of recitation), as the core of his edition. He then supplemented his edition with material from two manuscripts that were eventually made available to him. What is astonishing is the stability of the verses in this very disparate set of sources, and yet the richness of interpretive scope that they allow.

From such a small set of sources, Grierson managed to convey the vast world of Lalla’s tradition. And yet, by no means does it include all the attempts made by many locals (scholars and enthusiasts) at the time, and in several different towns and villages of the valley, to collect verses of Lal Ded¹³; nor did Grierson’s edition exhaust the number of verses attributed to her in different recensions, be they manuscript or oral traditions, nor the different performative traditions current then. The time for ethnography of the nineteenth century is past, but there are still many more manuscripts to go over, which preserve for us the local, private and personal memories of Lal Ded.

Given such a delicate chain of transmission, I find speaking of a “contributory lineage” helpful and promising as a way to go forward, provided it does not erase the

¹¹ Ranjit Hoskote, (trans.), *I, Lalla*, (Penguin, New Delhi, 2011).

¹² Georg Abraham Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett, (trans. and eds.), *Lallāvākyaṇī, or the wise Sayings of Lal Ded, A Mystic Poetess of Ancient Kashmir*, (vol. 27 of Asiatic Society Monographs, London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1920).

¹³ This would include the efforts of Bhaskar Razdan, Lakshman Kak, Prakash Kokilo in the late nineteenth century who compiled, edited and commented on collections they acquired. For more on this lost world of local scholarship, see S. N. Pandita, “Lal Vākhs: Their Journey from Memory to Manuscript,” in S. S. Toshkani, ed., *Lal Ded: The Great Kashmiri Saint Poetess*, (Kashmir Education, Culture and Society, New Delhi).

astonishingly cohesive and coherent persona of Lalla that we meet in the verses that go with her name.

We do not at present have a history of this contributory lineage, though in this small selection, I have tried to point in the annotations to ways in which we might look for traces of its vital presence: in bilingual, sometimes trilingual puns; in imagery that involves more than one literary tradition; in variants and variations among different communities of reciters and different performative contexts; and, at times, in tensions within single communities of reception, where on occasion we can see intentional poetic ambiguities occluded through overzealous attempts to establish one fixed meaning.

Throughout the translations and annotations offered here, I have tried to emphasize the need for the student of Lalla to balance with justice the claims of manuscripts against the authority of living memory, and the overwhelming influence of place, history and media on both.

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How To Use this Translation

I believe that Lalla's words are best served by thinking of them as an integral. One limit of this integral is the quiescent knowledge that philosophical traditions have fought to bring into view, whose literary expression has been claimed to be silence; and the other limit is movement. At the limits of Lalla's speech are the movements of life, in thought, word and deed, recorded for us in her utterances. Let us sloganeer once more: To recite Lalla's *vākhs* is to live through speech as the integral of silence and motion. I have tried to translate these verses in a way that reconstitutes the effect of Lalla's Kashmiri, paying attention to the work not of words alone, but syllables, syntax and images. It is, above all, *movement* that I have tried to reconstitute. My translations take up more space, and employ even visual effects and modern devices of print where possible. I hope you will allow me this freedom.

The annotations, however, attempt something else. They attempt to recreate the materials by which to assess this literature as something other than a creature of print. I have tried to justify, or point to ways in which a translation must also capture the effects of the reception of Lal Ded and the oral transmission of her words over centuries. This can lead to such typographic effects in translation as columnated verse, in one instance, or repeated glosses on hard, ordinary words, heard differently, whether *seriatim*, or at once, or differently by different people. Here too I have allowed the fictional intimacy of print to try to approximate the real thing: when voice, heard in real time, allows for misprision and understanding alike.

THE WORDS OF LALLA

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...

All through my footsore verse,
a single story has befallen me:

I, Lalla, am on a lake
on what bank shall I now run aground?

*

Three times I've seen a lake flood a lake

Once, a lake, taking the place of sky
A waste of water, once, that was a bridge
From Crescent Face to Footprint Lake
that was the flowing world

Seven times a lake being the swell and shape of empty

*

In the time it takes
to take a breath, and more,
breath by slow breath,
I forced my still breath
down the bellows' throat

An offering-light lit up for me,
and what I was
came unrobed
into view.

I winnowed the light inside, scattering it out
and in the darkness, laying hold of it, I held on...

*

Not for a minute did I hope, nor by a hair trust in it
I, Lalla, drank from that wine, my own utterance.

I seized the inward dark indistinct; I hauled it down:
And hacked at it, tore through it, rend it to pieces.

*

I, Lalla, set out
 wanting to flower
 like the bloom of cotton:

that was I, tenuous,
 whom the seed-picking cleaner
then the carder so abused
 when the woman spinning
had lifted me off
 thread by trembling thread
that was I, so cruelly used,
 set to hang in the weaver's room.

When the washerman brought me down
 again and again
 against the washing stone,

that was I, and that was me he pressed
 and how long
 working in clays of earth

and soap deep within me. But when the tailor
 plied me into pieces,
 turning me around

beneath the long cloth scissors
 I reached, at last,
 the going way without measure.

*

I have seen a serious man hunger, and of hunger dying:
as a leaf being taken in winter
by the least wind,
ever so gentle.

I have seen a moron murderously beating
the man who feeds him,
and since then I, Lalla, am waiting
will it not be torn? This love,
ever so delightful.

*

Look at me:

towing a boat over vast waters with such slender sewing-thread
Where will my shining one hear me?
If only he would ferry
even me.

Stilled into quiet, as still-water lost
from unfired cups of clay.
Sick, my life wanders out...I want
to go home...

*

*

I have come down a road; I did not take
that road on.
When on the failing pier of floating bridges
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but found
Not a coin to hand:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I have come down a road; I did not take
that road on.
When on the steps along the bank
of my own mind
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but found
Not a coin to hand:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I have come down a road; I did not take
that road on.
When on the failing pier of floating bridges
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but could not place
the taking-name of God:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I have come down a road; I did not take
that road on.
When on the steps along the bank
of my own mind
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but could not place
the taking-name of God:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

*

*

I came down a road; and leaving,
I took that road on.
When on the failing pier of floating bridges
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but found
Not a coin to hand:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I came down a road; and leaving,
I took that road on.
When on the steps along the bank
of my own mind
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but found
Not a coin to hand:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I came down a road; and leaving,
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When on the failing pier of floating bridges
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but could not place
the taking-name of God:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I came down a road; and leaving,
I took that road on.
When on the steps along the bank
of my own mind
my day went down.
I looked to my pockets, but could not place
the taking-name of God:

What am I to give the man on the ferry?

I, Lalla, walked in
 Through the door to the garden of the white flower
 Through the door to the garden of my own mind

and what did I see, but Quiescence blended in with Power!

I dissolved there in the living lake of undying
 And dying alive,
 what can anything do to me?

*

I wasted away, out looking for myself

I cannot believe that the knowledge concealed
 has been reached, not by anyone

I set myself to dissolve and I reached
 That place
 Of wine, of nothing wanting,
 The first place, and the place beyond

where there are vessels,
 every one of them filled
 and not anyone there
 drinking

*

What is happening to me?
 What complexion of experience
 What trial beyond the pale?

My claws torn out by the hoopoe's breaking beak

 All through my footsore verse
a single story has befallen me:

I, Lalla, am on a lake
 on what bank shall I now run aground?

Annotations to the Verses

I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only a gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity.

Vladimir Nabokov, "Problems of Translation," *Partisan Review* 12: 496-512.

Sir, isn't the mind witness enough,
For the taste on the tongue?

...

is it right, sir, to bring out the texts
for everything?

Basavaṇṇa (12th century), translated from the Kannada by A. K. Ramanujan.

(The verses are here identified by their first lines in translation in bold face).

All through my footsore verse...

See the notes to the full verse translated as the last verse in this sequence.

Three times I've seen a lake

This is a verse I do not wish to explain away. It is enigmatic however you look at it. What I shall try and do is fill out such concrete allusions as an auditor could be expected to know.

The first thing to say is that the word 'seen' does not occur. It could be: *I can remember on three occasions a lake...*; that is what the Sanskrit translator Rājānaka Bhāskara thought. The effect is arguably weakened by such fillers as his and my own. Lal Ded's words place us in a world without the intruding subject, but yet which is intimate with our own.

Between Haramukh (in Sanskrit, Haramukūṭa) to the North, famous for its lake, and the mountain lake of Kausar (or, Konsar in Kashmiri; Kramasaras in Sanskrit) to the South, lies the valley of Kashmir. The lake is said to be a footprint of God (Viṣṇu) when he paced out the worlds by taking three strides, whence its name in Sanskrit. The lake is over two miles wide when the ice melts, and is an active place of pilgrimage to this day. Mount Haramukh, the mountain of the crescent crown, or the mountain of God Shiva, is also associated with a famous lake, construed to be the source of the river. So revered that one text in Sanskrit, the *Haramukūṭa-gaṅgā-mahātmya* says of the mountain: "The departed fathers sing songs on seeing one born in their lineage setting off, towards Haramukuta mountain." (from page 40, adapted from the translation of Kamlesh Birmani, of a manuscript collected by Aurel Stein, (MSS d48, (IX), Bodleian Library, Oxford). It is said that the sight of the mountain is liberating and not the sight alone; even hearing the name of the mountain, is equivalent to a pilgrimage of long labor to its waters.

For a tradition of legends on Harmukh (not to be taken as scholarship necessarily, but as an example of tradition):

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2007/May/9/haramukh-and-gangabal-a-historical-perspective-11.asp>

and on Konsar Lake:

<http://panunkashmir.org/blog/pilgrimage-2/konsarnag-myth-legend-and-history/>

For an archived photograph:

<http://www.searchkashmir.org/2010/03/konsar-nag-and-mollen-pot-hole.html>

The entire verse is alive with puns and alliteration on the word 'saras', lake. The penultimate line offers us a pun on the words 'sum saras', meaning a lake that was a bridge, and 'samsāras', which is the flowing world of birth and death. The last line also involves a pun:

Sati nēngi saras shūnākār

which is literally: "on seven (*sati*) occasions, a lake (*saras*), the shape of emptiness". But in Sanskrit *Satī-sāras* is a very particular lake, the true-lake, or the lake of Satī (the consort of Shiva) which once filled the valley of Kashmir before being drained to make possible human dwelling. The verse seems at first to offer us an apocalyptic vision of seemingly permanent fact, the nature of being here troped as a lake the shape of emptiness, our origin and our end. But in this verse the condition of being conceals a temporal, even historical reality: the deep history of the seemingly terrestrial and secure valley and the beginnings of a human epoch. The riddle of

the relationship of form and emptiness, of beings and the nature of being, is offered to us as a treasure, concealed and distributed in the words of the last line. This last verse invites us to revisit the incredible first line of the poem, which conceals a lake in a lake, where even the syllables in the words for “lake” and “spilling” spill over one another:

trayi něngi sarāh sarⁱ saras

Three times a lake spilling the banks of a lake

For students of Lal Ded alive to Persian and Arabic, they might consider how the verse may have struck those whose world of references and sacred geography were oriented differently. Consider a resonance the word ‘Konsar’ (or as spelled in manuscripts, ‘Kausar’) in Kashmiri might have. The Hauzu’l-Kausar in Arabic is the name for the *lake or fountain of abundance* in Jannah (paradise). Persons having crossed the As-Sirāt, (the hair’s width bridge) arrive at this lake, from which one is expected drink to forget any bad experiences they may have had during their lives, before moving further into paradise. (The word Sirāt, spelled variously at first in Arabic, appears ultimately to be the Helenised **στράτα** of Latin: *strata* (street), which entered Arabic via Syriac.

It is just possible that the line speaking of a bridge across the valley in the shape of a lake is also a bridge between vastly different imagined geographies for the communities of the valley. I put that out there as a possibility.

In the time it takes

I might have translated the opening, with Grierson, more quickly: “Slowly, slowly, did I stop my breath in the bellows pipe of my throat.” I should state first that I have allowed my translation to dilate while bringing across the first foot of this verse, to allow a reader to feel the effect of the repetition of ‘*dam*’ (and the syllable ‘*ma*’), and the meaning of the words themselves: *dam* meaning breath, or blast of air, or moment; and its homonym, *dam* (from a Sanskrit root), which means restraint; *damāh dam* can be used to highlight breathing when received as nouns, and adverbially, the gentle, slowness with which breath by breath one achieves quieting of breath:

Damāh dam korumas daman-hālē

If we do not take our time about the first line, it seems to me we destroy the grammatical way in which this line does what it says: to make of an activity the instrument of its cessation, as the line takes nouns (breath by breath) as adverb (gently) and folds them into a state which brings closure (the word ‘suppression’, or ‘restraint’). It is a line to relish.

A variant opening is recorded, and theology recruited to explain one’s preference for one line over another. Against the line I have translated, the following which differs by a single word (highlighted in bold below) has been preferred by others:

Damāh dam korumas daman-āye

This line would read, according to its source, Professor Mohiuddin Hajini, as follows: slowly, slowly, I held it [and read here ‘the mind’] straight to the aim (*āye*) of restraint (*daman*). To make ‘āye’, is to steady something, to place something in a particular way. So one translator, who takes the whole line, allowing the reference to mind which is not there in the text: “Slowly, I trained my mind to suspend its processes and thoughts.”

I am not sure I understand the image here taken on its own – indeed, even if there is an image. The best I can make of it is to say that it asks us to imagine holding the mind steady, as one would hold a blade, or something similar, tempering it over the fire. That would make a fine image, though it would leave obscure how one achieves interiority, aesthetically speaking, with such an image. Notice the bellows in the corner of such an image, which feeds the fire that tempers the blade of the mind. What we want, surely, is to get into the bellow’s throat, and find a space within.

And the theological reason for preferring this reading is not convincing to me: namely, that Lal Ded being a particular sort of Hindu ascetic (one taking her cues from ‘Kashmiri Shaivism’ – if understood as a single, coherent and univocal entity, a very elusive creature created by scholars, mind you) *could not* have advocated a naïve regimen of the suppression of breath as a means to awakening, or realization, as some traditions and practices of the Self, both Hindu and Muslim, do. There is no need to consider, however, that Lalla is enjoining a very specific breathing regimen, namely what is called ‘the bellows breath’ in some forms of *yoga* – that is to breathe in increasingly strenuous ways, and it is not something that Lalla here says she is doing. I am afraid we are making theological and ascetic molehills out of aesthetic heights.

There is another argument as well, this one aesthetic: that the bellows pipe is an unworthy image for a poet of Lalla’s caliber, and it is better to focus not on the bellows in the smithy, but

the result, the glowing edge of the metal worked on. (These reasons are summarized in Professor M. Hajjini's ground breaking and magisterial work, *Kashir Shayirī*, (no. 4, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1960, page 4). With due respect to the scholars who would agree with Professor Hajjini, I think the intrusion of theology into the aesthetics of this marvelous verse misguided. I do not think we need the brilliant image of the 'bellows' throat' as opposed to the vague and unconvincing restraint of the mind and suspension of all its activity to do anything more than provide a way to startle us into interiority a space within which serves as the stage for the dramatic acts to follow. No endorsement of a particular doctrinal or ascetic tradition need here be intended. I hope not. For indeed the 'suspension of all thought' is as alien to many of Lalla's Shaiva forebears as is the suppression of breath, and it is in the name of such forebears that we are finally asked to reject the space of the bellows. Let us then stick with the better, or at least crisper image. You will claim that this is a long detour. But it is important to witness the kinds of ways in which Lalla's words are received, edited and settled on.

It is worth noting another variant here of a different variety. Musicians who chant this song have been known to replace the word '*dīph*', a votive light, a lamp made of a cotton wick in a basin of oil, (translated as 'offering light') with the more familiar Kashmiri word '*t'song*'. Of this lamp, perhaps less obviously indexed as Hindu, the following description from the early 1890s should suffice: "Another lamp from Srinagar, is napiform of red terra cotta with spout. The wick channel is cut through the rim and the reservoir is open above, as in the Turkestan lamps. This specimen is decorated with incised triangles and the border is scalloped. the native name is *song* [should be T'song]." It is evident that the way in which a torch like this is lit, and held, is very different from the smaller more intimate votive lamp called to mind by *dīph*. (More on Kashmiri lamps may be found here, on a website which serves to collect the stubborn and fragmented memory of a scattered and exiled people for their place:

<http://www.searchkashmir.org/2013/09/and-then-there-was-tsong.html>).

Such details are impossible to translate.

Let me close with the words of the eighteenth century commentator, Rājanāka Bhāskara. He says that the 'inward', in 'inward light', is best understood as pointing us to the dramatic scene 'in one's own body'. All the body is world enough to be a stage for Lalla.

Not for a minute...

A remarkable verse for four reasons. The first two reasons have to do with the way in which it comes to rest in action after a noun-heavy opening. The closing sequence of verbs is the first reason to take note of the verse, and the sheer, unparalleled violence of its closing verbs the second. They begin to take over from the last half of the third foot of the verse: [*andarimu gaṭākāh*] *raṭīth ta wolum / tsaṭīth ta dyutumās tatiṃ cākḥ*: we see her grabbing on to darkness, and hauling it down, cutting it, and there, rending it into pieces. That last verb is particularly abrupt, a sharp sound that has all the finality of the sound cloth being expertly and irrevocably torn into pieces. Cākḥ! The sound reverberates like an awful exclamation.

I have seen verbal parataxis in Kashmirian Sanskrit hymns of praise to Shiva, but rarely. To take one example, which antedates Lalla's words, Sāhib Kaul in the seventeenth century praises the effects of worship with a bit of parataxis:

I sing without restraint I dance;
I am contented; I savor
the all containing savor
that cannot be uttered¹⁴

Thus, such movement in syntax when inspired, even seized by God in worship or special states, is not all that unusual; but Lalla's violent imagery, and the concomitant violent verbal flavor is, changing the theological emphasis slightly, to understate things a bit.

In Lalla, consuming one's own words (as one would wine) leads to an explosion of paratactic movement but it is ambiguous whether the wine of her own voice aided her in the dark, or whether it was necessary to extinguish first the public light of the word, the better to come to terms with the constitutive, indefinite private darkness within.

The third reason for taking note of this verse is the magisterial word for darkness: *gaṭākāh*; not simply darkness (*gaṭākḥ*), but with the suffix, "an indefinite dark". This contrasts finely with the word for 'inside'. The Kashmiri word '*andarmyu*' is not simply what is inside, but what is constitutively so.

The fourth reason to linger on this verse is its closing verb, *cākḥ* (pronounced *chākḥ*). That is a denominative verb in Kashmiri from Persian idiom, and not an idle verb at that. It figures prominently in Persian poetics when describing the utter limits of devotion, either in love or worship, when a madness and fatigue seizes the lover, and he rends the collar of his cloak, rending it into pieces (*chākḥ*). But Lalla's verbal idiom would then turn no ordinary cloth inside out, but her being seizing the darkness like a cloth of indefinite proportions, one which covers our being no less for being on the inside. Doing this has also turned the poetic idioms of both Saiva and Islamic devotion if not inside out then beyond immediate recognition it is her her own words, and not the presence of God nor loving devotion nor the real thing that serve as the intoxicating medium and to uncertain effect, as we had reason to note above; and

¹⁴ From the fiftieth verse of the *Sahajārcana śaṣṭīkā*, or *Sixty Verses of and on Spontaneous Worship*: *gītaṃ ca nṛtam amitaṃ ca karomi tuṣṭāḥ pūrṇaṃ rasaṃ ca rasayāmi kam apy avācyam*. This is my translation, though I am indebted once again to the work of Hamsa Stainton for bringing this verse to my attention. Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry and Prayer: Stotras in the Religious and Literary History of Kashmir*, (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2013), 150.

it is not the result that is inebriation of sorts, to be celebrated or expressed in antinomian yet celebrated behavior; nor yet are we at the limits of stamina of devotion or love. To my ears at least, Lalla's movements are uncannier by far than anything I have yet seen in poetry of praise, devotion or longing. (My thanks to Jane Mikkelson for seizing on the last word of this verse and nudging me along; what Pandit Rājanaka Bhāskara would have made of that last verb is unknown to me – none of the manuscripts of his translation and commentary into Sanskrit which we possess contains this verse).

I, Lalla, set out...

Unlike many other verses, this is an example of a pair of verses offered to us as a unit. This is a fairly straightforward pair of verses to understand, so I shall not belabor the interpretation. They are united not only by theme, but by the framing lines, the first line of the first verse, and the last line of the second:

I, Lalla, set out wanting to flower...

... I reached, at last,
the going way without measure.

It is custom, for example, to make heavy weather of what is called ‘a spiritual interpretation’ of this verse. I find the word misleading. First, because I do not know what work the word “spiritual” does, the word being so denuded of content, and misleading on account of the implicit contrast – what does the word ‘spiritual’ here oppose? Surely not ‘the literal’? And it is misleading to speak of the ‘quotidian’ here being opposed to the ‘spiritual’. All in all, we are better off without such imprecise thrusts with such a blunt instrument.

Second, I think the word ‘spiritual’ suggests, and wrongly, that there is an allegory below the surface of what is said. This is wrongheaded. It is superficially (etymologically speaking) given to us to pay attention to what is being suggested. If Lalla says “I set out, wanting to flower like a bloom of cotton,” we would be dullards at best to then claim we must pull up our sleeves to suggest a non-literal meaning. It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that Lalla does not (literally) walk out of the house wanting to (literally or spiritually) become fluff. Allegory is too blunt a tool to do anything but mar a stretch of verse as aesthetically refined as this, which is in the domain of metaphor and not simile to be sure, but certainly not personified abstractions.

If that does not convince a reader, consider that the last line gives one the license to make of the verses what one will, call it spiritual or no, and thus again I find the suggestion that there is a deep meaning (below the surface) simply unnecessary. We have what we need on the surface of things. But this does not take away (or should not take away) from the remarkable precision, and more importantly, the invention at work.

The precision is there in the usage of workaday nouns for extremely specific occupations: a cleaner of cotton, a carder, a spinning woman, a washerman and a tailor, and so on. In his translation of this verse, Ranjit Hoskote has added another very fine thing to the translation which I have omitted: “the cleaner tore me, the carder shredded me on his bow.” He has given us verbal details (the verbs for actions of the implements) that are not present in the original, but implied in the first verse, though named in the second. I have omitted them from the first verse, trusting to the reader. Even the weaver’s loom is not mentioned, only the weaver’s workshop. This contrast between the two verses in the verbal details seems to me important. It is only the second of the two verses which introduces details: the washerman’s stone, and the physical abuse of being thrashed from a height, and the scissors, and the cyclic, plying violence of the tailor who subjects cloth to being measured out in fragments.

Along with the precision and thus care with which Lalla attends to the world about her, there is literary invention – the metamorphosis, through metaphor, of a person into the natural world. The invention is perhaps known ‘in the other direction’ so to speak, in personifications of

nature, such as in the medieval English and Scotch personifications of barley, or ale. An example closer to hand, so to speak, is available. A professional singer of tales in Kashmir, Hātim Tilawonu of Panzil, was recorded in 1896. His stories, his diction, vocabulary and recitation, embodied a long tradition of these tales, one of which seems relevant to Lalla's verse: the lament of a flute, which once was a reed, and torn from its forest, tortured by a carpenter till it became a flute. This story is credited by the teller of tales to one Subhān.¹⁵

The flute in the tale herself tells us that it is a story of pain, and it ought to be heard, by us patiently, if at all we have ever experienced pain. From her beautiful time in the woods, a 'fate-thief' (*lōn-tzūr*) arrived, a woodcutter; he struck her, ground her to powder till she was splinters. Having carted her in pieces from her home, the story goes on as the reed speaks of the travails at the hand of the carpenter: where like Lalla, the verbs of suffering begin to predominate: she was turned about, then hurt with the adze, then cut with the saw, and then mounted to the lathe.

Mr. W. Crooke believes that the story has echoes in the traditions of the *Thousand and One Nights*, in the story of "Alī Nūr al-Dīn and Miriam, the Girdle Girl, who reconstituted thirty two pieces of wood from a bag which composed an Indian lute, which sang, when it sang, of its travails of its journey from earth and water to the suffering at the hands of carpenter who polished it, the merchants who made it, and the ship that carried it away from home. (We might also think of the reed whose lament of separation is used by perhaps the greatest of Persian poets, Rūmi, to begin his *Mathnawi*; Recall one of the most intriguing prologues in world literature, certainly one of the most famous of any, available since 1273: Rūmi's reed, to which we are opportuned to listen: and not simply to any sound, but to the reed 'as it puts before us a grievance, makes a complaint (*besno in ney chun shikāyat mī konad*), and in its grievance brings into view, what, but the story of separations (*az judāihā hekāyat mīkonad*). Not its own story, mind you, but the story of others, to which it has given voice, the howl of lament (*nālīdān*), which it is fit to give, given its own brutal separation from the reed-bed in which it was at home. That it is to Rumi we should look is clear from the Kashmiri teller of tales' diction and words: '*soy judōyi chey wanān*' *going away from that forest, the flute speaks of that very separation!* There is a wider world here of interconnected themes and techniques.

Despite the relevance of such stories of personification of pain in the 'life' of voiceless, yet sonorous instruments of expression vital to our own voices, and which we afford at great cost we ourselves do not always attend to, here we move in the other direction from personification, as it were, where a person gives voice to her passage through becoming imminent to that world, to keep with Lalla's metaphor for metamorphosis.

And were I to suggest what is misleadingly called a spiritual interpretation, I would urge students to consider what is surely significant; the alteration of the active frame, 'I lalla did such-and-so', with the passive, passage of trials, only to result, spontaneously, in the active denouement. If there is something to be gleaned by way of paraphrasable lesson, it is here, in the dark suggestion of suffering, (grammatically and personally) offset against the mysterious wellsprings of spontaneity. There is a saying, attributed to Lal Ded's younger contemporary, Nūr ud-dīn, and also attributed to Lal Ded herself by some that approaches the effects of this poem: "*yeli yes bani, teli suy zāni,*" which may be translated as saying "it is only when one suffers that one truly knows." Suffering then, speaking of grammar and experience. This is the common thread of Lalla and the song of the reed-flute mentioned above.

I should like to say, in closing, that I have been inspired by a conceit Ranjit Hoskote allowed himself when translating these verses. He has, at one point, the phrase: "that gossamer:

¹⁵ Sir Aurel Stein, (with the assistance of George A. Grierson and Pandit Govind Kaul), *Hatim's Tales: Kashmiri Stories and Songs*, (London, 1923), xxxi; xxxvi-xxxvi; 38-44.

that was I / the spinning woman lifted from her wheel". (Hoskote, *I, Lalla*, (Penguin India, New Delhi, 2012,) 40). I like the solution, but have allowed it to be distributed across all the lines, in anticipation in part of the framing device I spoke of. I should say, again, this is one of the most successful of Hoskote's renditions of Lalla, and I am loathe to depart from a word of it. I have belabored "thread by thread," to highlight Lalla's word, *tayi*, which is not only a word for spinning woman, but through a homonym, for "threads" of a fine, tenuous quality in the plural. The conceit of distributing the effects across lines is partly inspired by Lalla, and partly, a visual conceit of my own to help map Lalla's syntax. I want the lines to thread.

I have seen a serious man hunger...

The four lines are rhymed: *abab*. The rhyme words are dying (*marān*), and beating (*mārān*), and *lah*, gently, and *prah*, adoring love. Encouraged by the opposition in lines one and three between a serious man and an idiot we might consider this a simple meditation on opposites alone. It is to be sure, in some sense, a meditation on opposites, as any invocation of the contrasting behavior of a wise man and a fool may encourage us to suppose. (I could with justice have translated the words as wise and fool, if the pitch perfect and superb theodicy of our times, the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man*, did not give me the perfect resonance for *gāṭul*, (someone wise, serious) for an American audience. A *gāṭul* is distinguished not by wisdom alone, but by their never fluctuating between base states on the basis of superficial stimuli they do not, therefore, idly smile.

The easiest way to understand this verse (as has been done) is to claim for it a statement of the unfairness of the world. In our world the virtuous, the serious man, the wise man, falls for want of what the moron, the undeserving has, and abuses. Presumably, then, the verse is a plaintive plea for the world, such as it is described above, to end in some way for the person, signaled 'I, Lalla'. And the imagery, that of the leaf falling to wind, is merely illustrative of tragedy, though some might find this an imperfect image.

We may go on to give this kind of a reading the support it does not typically elicit in commentary, which is to say that the I of the persona, the speaker, identifies with the hapless, those subject to suffering, the verbs 'dying' and 'being beaten'. Such is the world, not only unfair, but unrelenting – we are its mercy even to cease to confront it. This would allow us to make better sense of the leaf, utterly subject to wind.

I will not say for this kind of a reading that it is false. It is, rather, selective. In particular, it focuses on the nouns: the serious man, the cook (the one who feeds another), the moron, and even, Lalla. What such a reading does not take into account is the texture of the verse and its focal use of participles. In particular, it does not take into account the meditation on adjectival nouns, and nouns, and participles, which the rhyme scheme calls to our attention.

For the last line has waiting, *prārān*, which recalls to us the rhyme words in lines one and three: "since then, I, Lalla, am waiting". But the clause in which it occurs is a marvelous one, combining the grammatical resources of the entire verse.

I read the last line as a resolution of the rhyme, which opposes unbearable participles with nouns of gentility, and value: the gentle wind, and the love in this world, and of this world, to which we look to redeem the indefinitely prolonged experience of the times of murder, hunger and death. Prolonged, because when we are among such experiences, we do not experience their bounds, and ultimately fatal, because when the bounds of experience manifest themselves, we are unfitted for them. Already we know something is wrong. The gentle wind, the slightest breeze, comes when it comes too late: and after hardship, is an instrument sufficient to harm. The leaf, hanging through the Autumn, is taken at last. But even in that line, note the participle: being taken, *harān*. It is easily lost in the cluster of nouns, and adjectives. We are not like the fallen, or the fragile, or the gentle: but the falling.

Thus, the last line of Lalla will have none of the opposition of the rhyme scheme. What is, at last, intolerable about the participle condition, is precisely our having to wait, and suffer even the injurious gentle times, which enclose our indefinite hardships.

And so the line does as good as it says: *tana Lal boh prārān tshenem-nā prah*; it includes, in its cry, no simple opposition of participle and noun, but includes the participle (*prārān*), nouns of temporality (looking back and forward in time), and a verbal form, *tshenem*, (future participle from *tshenun*, to become cut): will it not be torn from me? The grammatical line looks for a way out of the opposition the verse dramatizes.

Look at me...

When the poet Zinda Kaul in the early years of the twentieth century sought to invent a speaking voice in Kashmiri, a voice that could be reliably thought to fit in with a new literary form, a lyrical meditation, so to speak, he recalled the ways of Lal Ded and reached for her words. Zinda Kaul threaded this musical refrain through one of his meditations:

Zuv chum bramān gatshahā bo tor
Karanāvi tārakh nā apor?

I am soul-sick, that I may go there
Ferryman, will you not give me passage across?¹⁶

The first line of the refrain is, of course, an echo of the closing line of the *Lalla-vākh* here translated, as is the word ‘*tār*’ in the second line an echo of Lal Ded’s central image in the verse translated here: one of riverine crossings. But consider the two phrases together, Lal Ded’s and Zinda Kaul’s, separated by some five hundred years or more. Which one seems more immediate now? Zinda Kaul has tamed Lal Ded’s idiom, and made the image of a life, or soul wandering out, soul-sickness, a convenient and poetic idiom for expressing a wish: *I really do wish I could go there!* Lal Ded does not allow the line, or the wish expressed, such clear syntactic comfort. She allows us to linger on the startling etymological resonance of the phrase, *zuv chum bramān*, literally, *my life moves about restlessly*, and begins an abrupt, and stark utterance: *I want to go home*. Zinda Kaul’s echo, seemingly almost uncomfortable with Lal Ded’s stark voice, allows the wish in the future form of the verb ‘to go’ to be followed by an index of comfort, a word for place, ‘there’. Lal Ded leaves us with the indefinite wish, ‘I want to go’, ‘if only I could go’ (*gar gatshaho*); there is a seeming ellipsis, which no rhyme will fill in, and no comfort provided.

I have chosen this verse not only because it is among the most commonly cited verses, but because it is a brilliant example of lyrical intelligence when the rhyme fails to obtain. (It is thus a perfect complement to the verse before it, when the perfect rhyme is part of the argument).

Āmi pana sodaras nāvi ches lamān
Kati bōzi day myonu; me-ti diyī tār
Āmen tākēn poñu zan shemān
Zuv chum bramān — gara gatshahō

While it is not necessary for the four-line verse to obey a rhyme scheme, it is significant I think to note here how the rhyme is broken. Lines 1 and 3 rhyme, with the verb, *lamān* and *shemān*, indicating here futility (more on *shemān* below). But the rhyme is not completed where one might expect it, nor is the right rhyme repeated. We might wait for a word to rhyme with *tār*, passage across, but the prayer is not answered, and the rhyme is left incomplete. Instead, the verbs of futility are echoed in the verb *bramān*, restless, wild movement (here of the soul). And the line is interrupted, and a new alliteration and thought begun: I want to go home [*gar*

¹⁶ Trilokinath Raina, (ed. and transl.), *An Anthology of Modern Kashmiri Verse (1930-1960)*, (Poona, 1972), 45-47.

gatshaho], a line unto itself, startling in Kashmiri as it would be in English, if a speaker stopped a well-formed sentence, and began again, with an abrupt wish, uttered in fatigue.

There is a fierce intelligence controlling the scansion of the lines here. Recall the chief word, *tār*, (passage, crossing) which goes unanswered here (being the end word of line 2, it really sets you up to meet with it again at the close of the verse, in line four). But the passage is enacted at the level of the line, which when complete, ought to be a sentence of four stresses. The only sentences which make it across the full length of four stresses, it is worth repeating, are lines which reinforce a sense of defeat: *I am towing a boat with a rope of untwisted thread / I go to waste, as water from unfired cups of clay*. The last line has the sense of saying: not only can I not get across the river, I cannot complete a single thought. The turbulence of the waters is now internalized in the restless movements of the mind.

Why begin with the line: ‘look at me’ when it is not mentioned? The pronoun *āmi* indicates something within sight of the speaker, and perhaps even the listener. *Here I am, towing...with this slender thread*.

I have also included this verse as an example of one of the most commonly recited verses of Lalla. I have found it, to take an example from random, cited in an announcement of the anniversary of a death of a lady in the most recent issue of *Koshur Samachar*, a periodical with news, and thoughts for the exiled Pandit community. Some reported usage of this verse indicates that it is also read now as an example of nostalgia in exile, as recording a concrete desire to want to return to a lost home.

I would like to note here one last point. The verb, *shemun*, the present participle of which is here translated as “I still unto quiet, as water lost...”, is otherwise a word counted as a value in a religious context; it being none other than “to be quiet, to be at peace,” as in *sām-*, a verbal root from Sanskrit, meaning “to be stilled”. I have chosen a particularly difficult, even archaic phrasing, from the verb still, and with the word “stillicide” in the background. I thank Jane Mikkelson of the University of Chicago for discussing this difficult, ordinary word with me, and for bringing to my attention the beautiful word, *stillicide*, “the dripping of water from the eaves of roofs”, from Latin *stilla*, drop.

I came down a road...

The reason for presenting eight versions of what is otherwise accounted a single poem by editors is simple: I am trying to present something of what is of value in such variation as is constitutive of the life of an oral tradition to a reader accustomed more to editions prepared on the basis of print, when such editions are more often than not prepared for readers who are expected to be habituated to the silent decisions made for them by editors. The inspiration for presenting the poem like this goes back to a suggestion made by Kenneth Bryant concerning critical editions of manuscripts of oral poetry in his 'The Bottom of the Page: Representing Variation in an Oral Tradition', in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, A. W. Entwistle, C. Salomon, H. Pauwels, and M.C. Shapiro, (eds.), (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 87-100.¹⁷

In truth, I am trying to make perspicuous two kinds of variations. The first is what I would call a framing variation. This verse is remembered differently depending on a single variation in the first line, a single syllable to be precise: *na* and *ti*, the first negating, the second adding and affirming. We have thus two possible frames for the poem: *I came down* and *I left on that road*, as opposed to the very different, *I came down, and I did not leave by that road*. This difference, palpably, generates very different expectations for the rest of the verse. It is important that we notice how it is the constant element, the road, which creates the climate of indecision. We do not even know whether Lalla, on either alternative, ever stays behind. All she says is that she did not take *that* road.

It is worth perhaps noting here another verse of Lalla's which plays with orientation at a cross-roads, beginning:

I have come, but from which direction?
By what road?
I am to go,
but in what direction?
How will I know the road?

Recall that our poem takes place at a cross-roads, literally and figuratively: it is a cross-road, at a certain time of life, between life and death, or momentous turn in her life; at a river-crossing, or some great indecision (as she waits, on the failing banks of her mind), or an important juncture on her path to awakening; it is dusk (as the daylight sinks, marked more personally as 'sinking down for me' (*līstum*)). I find it thus appropriate, even masterful, that the oral tradition has

¹⁷ Though I have avoided his suggestion that we use the footnote. I find the footnote no true solution to representing oral variation, for the footnote cannot be heard, only read, and as such is a quintessential creature of print – a device to delight the eye and mind, not the ear. Variation and the cultivation of ambiguity through phonetic proximity is a different device, and requires a way to challenge the eye, not comfort it with such devices as the footnote. Whether columnation can work better is not, of course, assured. We are not speaking of assurance here, merely a gesture.

refused to allow a poem which plays itself out on all these crossroads to settle for a definitive opening, one that would allow us to settle for a single allegorical key to the rest of the poem. In not settling on one version of the frame of the poem we create anew Lalla's meaning.

There is a second kind of sensitivity consequent to the virtues of an oral tradition at work here. Within the framing of this poem, which we have considered, there are two variations in the poem encouraged by hearing, rather than seeing a printed version of the poem. Consider the phrase '*suman-sothi-manz*', and the word, '*hār*'. If we printed the poem we would have, 'on the embankment (*sothi*) made with temporarily lashed, floating planks', or 'precarious bridges' (*suman*). (I have taken the liberty in translation to use the alliteration 'failing pier of floating bridges' for the alliterative compound *suman-sothi* that last word actually reinforces the sense of being on the way, for it refers to an embankment along a river used as a road. The compound entire means an embankment of bridges, where the path is unusable unless the gaps are covered by footbridges, precariously lashed together plank by plank). But to return to our reading, the sense of a concrete embankment, a road along a river, would in turn allow us to see only one meaning for the *hār* Lalla cannot find to hand: a cowry, a form of currency. I would not go so far as to say that this reading would give us an entirely concrete situation, of a woman standing on a broken and failing path, trying to cross a river. For the suggestion of looking for a coin to pay for her passage is strongly reminiscent of the ritual belief that when a person dies, the soul requires passage over the dangerous and hazard-filled river Vaitaraṇī, a trial which a coin in the mouth of the deceased can help allay, by buying passage on a ferry. This would be meaning enough in dusk for most. But hearing the poem, with a living speaker's voice to aid meaning, allows us more. The phrase '*suman-sothi-manz*' which we considered above may be (and has been) heard as '*swoman-sothi-manz*', which is 'on the embankment of my own mind'. This may or may not reinforce a second variation, this time on the word '*hār*'. That has also been recorded as not simply saying '*ta hār na athe*', "and there was no coin to hand," but '*har nāv na athe*', which is to say, "there was not the name Hara to hand"; 'Hara' being one of the names for Shiva, meaning 'the Taker', or 'the Seizer'.

There are further minor variants recorded. But even with this, consider the point again: the indecisions opened up, and kept open, by allowing speech to remain speech, has this benefit: our having the choices we have is now among Lalla's many meanings. For at the end, surely, Lalla waits, in outer and interior landscapes, on bridges of stone and embankments of her mind, by dark, flowing waters, here and beyond, without either currency to place in the mouth: not a coin, nor the name of God. Or perhaps not. If the first line is heard to say: I took that road on. But it is only our decision to pre-empt the possibilities and thus send Lalla on away from us.

I, Lalla, walked in...

Beginning with this verse, I have chosen the next three verses on account of the presence in them (if I am right) of the Persian and Arabic languages, or literary registers and religious imagery at home in the greater Islamicate world. These are not transparently anachronistic verses, yet verses in which we feel the presence of a larger world. In these verses, the presence of Persian is at the level of pun, image or theme, but sits rather unobtrusively I feel. Whether or not we attribute this to the knowledge of Persian or Arabic possible in the fourteenth century in Kashmir – these were already used in bureaucratic circles – or whether we consider them to be further strands woven in the Lalla tapestry through the centuries is for future scholars to decide. I think any appreciation of Lalla, however, which ignores these, would be censorable.

The first verse, beginning, **I, Lalla, walked in through the door to the garden**, is fairly obviously a pun between two languages, Persian and Kashmiri (looking back to a Sanskrit word). The word is *soman*, which in Persian, is a contraction of *yāsmīn*, the jasmine flower. The word can at times refer to any fragrant, white flower the color of jasmine. I think it interesting that we are to use Persian to get the more immediate sense of the line (or alternatively, that a speaker of Persian would have less difficulty completing the expectation begun by the word “garden”, for not the image alone, but the word *bāg* is Persianate): “I, Lalla, walked in through the door to the garden of the white flower.” It is when we supplement this line with our knowledge of Kashmiri, and Sanskritic Kashmiri at that, that we get the word we have seen used above in a pun: “*so-man*, *swo-man*, in Kashmiri, and in Sanskrit, *sva-man*:- my own mind.” I cannot think a verse which relies heavily on the verbs, *mīlith*, and *lay*, ‘blending in’ and ‘absorption’ / ‘dissolving’, that the laving of two languages can be anything but portentous. The imagery of the garden to my mind evokes the Persianate literary and religious landscapes, and it is then significant that Lalla can internalize here that world, extruded by some as an alien landscape, as an interior landscape she is intimate with: it is through the garden that she is said to have seen Shiva and Shakti, God and his Innate Power, a vision explicitly marked by an exclamation: *Lal boh tsāyes soman-bāga-baras / wuchun Shivas Shekath milith ta wāh*.

With its vision of a Hindu theological union in the Persianate garden, the verse performs in its first lines the kind of imaginative leap her vision demands of her.

I have belabored the translation of the final clauses to bring out the twinning of ‘lake of ambrosia, immortality’ (*amreta-saras*), *amreta* literally meaning ‘not-dying’, with the verb ‘*maras*’, dying:

tati lay kurum amreta-saras
zinday maras ta me kari kyāh

*

I wasted away...

In this note I am departing from what is standard among interpretations. I strongly suspect in this verse the presence of an idiomatic range that is not that of Kashmiri alone. The phrase is *al-thāna*, “the place of *al*,” on which commentators, modern and pre-modern, are not in agreement, and when in agreement, agree for different reasons. Grierson reports *al* as meaning “wine” (and by extension in this verse, understand it to mean “nectar”, much like the verse we have seen before, a lake of ambrosia, or undying); Grierson says of it that it is wine offered to God in particular. In support of such a metaphoric of fluid delights we have the simple fact of the last line, recording for us “vessels, all filled, and not anyone drinking from them.”

There is more support of a kind Grierson did not consider. Jayalal Kaul (*Lal Ded*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1973, 34-35) records for us that when this verse is recited by Kashmiri musicians (particularly in the style of Sufiana school of music), there is a change in this line. Perhaps unfamiliar with the compound ‘*al-thāna*’, or uncomfortable with its obscure implications, musicians have been recorded as having long since changed the phrase to the now more familiar word derived from Persian literary culture, ‘*maikhāna*’, literally “a house of wine,” meaning a tavern, or less misleadingly, any place for the gathering of friends in the company of wine. This is at once an interpretation of Lal Ded’s phrase, to be sure, but it may also be an astute critical comment. It may suggest that the difficult Kashmiri phrase was to begin with a calque of Persian. In any event, Kaul himself follows the example of the musician’s Lal Ded, and translates this line to say: “I stopped searching, and love led me to the Tavern door,” which makes Lal Ded a singer in a long antinomian and visionary company of dandies, scholars, saints and poets who inhabit the vast literary landscape of Persian’s houses of wine. To my ear, the resonances of the word are not sufficient to get at the uncanny mood of Lal Ded’s place, with its vessels, to be sure, but where nobody drinks. The uncanniness is in no little part evoked by the single word ‘*al*’.

For even if a calque on Lal Ded’s part, why this difficult word ‘*al*’? The word ‘*al*’ by itself, however, is rather rare; not known to many native speakers I have consulted, and not contained in Grierson’s own dictionary of the Kashmiri language.¹⁸ (Except for one obscure use, in the phrase *al-pal*, the first two of a list with five items of ritually prohibited items and acts sanctioned for controlled use in some tantric ritual traditions, and well-known to students of Kaula tantra in Kashmir: wine, flesh, fish, certain gestures and sexual intercourse. In Sanskrit, all words on this list begin with the syllable ‘*ma*’; in this Kashmiri contraction, the phrase, ‘*al*’ refers to wine, and ‘*pal*’ to flesh; I have seen *al* used in the Lal Ded corpus only once, and then not on its own, but in the phrase ‘*al-pal*’, in a verse explicitly citing ritual: “Up, Woman, and go to make your offering / with wine and meat in your hands (*athē al-pal wakhur hyeth*). But the usual word Lalla uses for wine, or intoxicating drink, is *mas*, or *mad*, as in the line we have seen in the verse containing the line, “the wine, my own utterance...”. She could also use, as we

¹⁸ The medical missionary, William Jackson Elmslie’s *A Vocabulary of the Kashmiri Language* (London: 1872), a handy enough guide to ready-to-hand words in the nineteenth century, does not list ‘*al*’ as a common word for wine, though he lists a few: “*sharab, madapan, mas,*” and even the word we highlighted above, “*maikhana,*” for “shop of wine”.

have seen, the Sanskrit word *amṛta*, ambrosia, nectar of undying. Why such a difficult, obscure ritual word now?

In addition, Pandit Rājānaka, who exerted considerable efforts in translating this verse into Sanskrit, rendering it in the fluid, demanding and exciting *śārdūla-vikrīḍita* meter (a meter which imitates the playful gait of a tiger), clearly considering this verse important, took ‘*al*’ as not a word on its own (even though he knew the use of ‘*al-pal*’ elsewhere as an abbreviated list) but a contraction for the Sanskrit word *alam*, understanding the phrase to mean “the place of sufficiency,” or a place in which nothing is left out. His Kashmiri being far better than my own, and pre-modern to boot, I am nervous that he did not find the spirit of ritual intoxication in Lalla’s image here.

In the space of interpretive possibilities, I strongly think there is room to consider one more (or even more than one) language. We do not alone have to think that *al* is here the Arabic definite article, and that the phrase ‘*al-thāna*’ means ‘the place’, in two languages at once. Let us allow that ‘*al*’ means wine. If it does, could it not be influenced by the Persian *āl*, a tree whose roots were used for dyeing, and which gave its name to certain items of that reddish hue? (cf. *ālī-Shiraz*, the red stuff from Shiraz, or wine). The word, curiously, can also mean ‘a high place’ in Persian.

But let us venture more. Along with the contraction Pandit Rājānaka heard in Lalla’s verse, I am strongly tempted in the entire phrase ‘*al-thāna*’ to hear one or more puns. We only require that enough Arabic (if only bureaucratic, and not literary) was present in the valley, which it was in the fourteenth century. The phrase ‘*ath-thānī*’, to a reader versed in Arabic, might mean ‘the other, the second’. Would that not make sense? Perhaps the phrase is chosen to suggest to us a compound: from the root *a-w-l* in Arabic, meaning the first, *āl* might mean ‘family’; and then the phrase is: *the first and the other [place] [āl-[ath-] thānī]*, or *the family [āl] place [thāna]*. The metaphors of ‘family’ (*kula* in Sanskrit, *kola* in Kashmiri), for any student of the philosophy of those who oriented themselves to the God Shiva in Kashmir is a strong one, signifying the conditions for one’s embodied being.

We have ventured very far. I do not mean any of this to replace the meanings Grierson and Pandit Rājānaka discerned in this, only to supplement possibilities on the strength of trilingual puns in other verses. That is, I only mean to supplement a moment of insecurity any auditor will feel when they encounter such a verse thinking a single language, autonomous, isolated, is sufficient to meet the verse in its chosen places of repose.

I have largely eschewed in these notes any erudition derived from the long, and difficult scholastic corpus of theology written in Sanskrit. Perhaps it is not unfair to note here that there is always the resonance of learning in Sanskrit to help us along. If we ask, for example, to pursue my own questions listed above, why anyone should want to use a word which begins with the syllable ‘*a*’ when indicating a place of delight, consequent to knowledge, the commentators in Sanskrit (particularly the brilliant Kashmiri philosopher, scholar and commentator Abhinavagupta) would think the answer obvious. If you want to indicate the “nectar of the ultimate” (*anuttāra-amṛta-ākulam*), he says, a fitting description of realization of that which is a condition for our embodied being, and the effect of such realization, it is right and fitting that the word begin with ‘*a*’, the first sound, and which, lengthened to *ā*, a feminine sound in a way contained in ‘*a*’, contains both Shiva and Shakti, Being understood as Consciousness, and its innate Capacity to Act, in judgment and intention.

I would like to add that this note is entirely indebted to Jane Mikkelsen of the University of Chicago, who quarried across languages and on short notice when I inflicted this verse on her. Lalla deserves more readers like her.

what is happening to me?

*yih kyāh ösith yih kyuthu rang gōm
cang gōm tsaṭṭh huda-hudañey dagay
sāreniy padan kunuy wakhun pyōm
lali me trāg gōm laga kami shāṭṭhay*

At the beginning of the introduction I cited the closing lines of a verse the first two feet of which I claimed were found to be obscure. I should like to close this small collection of Lalla's verses with the same verse, citing here an interpretation of the first feet due to Professor Jayalal Kaul, and which continues the thread of Persian in Lalla.

Grierson reported that the chief difficulty lay with “*huda-hudañey*”, unknown to modern Kashmiris. Because of it, the line is dark. He suggested the rest might mean: “my claw has been cut(?) by a blow.” Kaul reasoned as follows: what we have to explain is “*hudahuda*”, after we discount the agentive markers of the word. Consider for ‘*hudahuda*’, in Kashmiri, the ‘*hudhud*’ (in Persian, from Arabic), the Upupa epops in Latin, or commonly in English, the hoopoe, known as such for the sharp call, and the bird’s bill striking the the ground at the end of its call. The call gave the bird its name, in English, and Arabic.

Jayalal Kaul’s bold suggestion works for me, and retains some of the magic of the verse. The part, particularly, about claws. The Quran knows the bird as the messenger of none less than Solomon; and in Farid ud-Din Attar’s *Mantīq-uṭ-Ṭayr*, *The Conference of the Birds*, (1177), the hoopoe is cast as the wisest of all birds, instructing the others in their search for the legendary Simorgh, which is to say, themselves. The hoopoe, then, has a long history of figuring in tales of awakening, and if he can be heard in Attar leading others across the seven famed valleys, why not figure in the song of one more valley? But even with this explanation, the line retains its dark metaphoric surprise: “my claws were torn out by the beak of the hoopoe”. Recall that the cry of the hoopoe, short, staccato, memorable, is followed by the sharp sounds of its striking beak. So is it in the Kashmiri: *huda-huda*, strange, musical and unknown, precedes the clipped and painful word *dagay*; the beak being implied by its violent effect; a chilling, musical effect that simply does not work in the English, however hard I tried.

The etymologist knows my words “experience” and “trial” are strictly redundant, looking to the roots of the word ‘experience’ in testing, trying. I have tried to ferry across the beauty of the word ‘rang’, which literally means ‘color’, or better, ‘hue’, which allows us form and color both. In idiom, ‘rang’ is a very difficult word to translate with any single word or even phrase. It can suggest deception, moving images which move us into belief too soon, and in Kashmiri, suffering, as in long travails of experiences that try and test the soul.

I have settled on ‘beyond the pale’, originally, of course, a proprietary boundary-marking image, to allow the reader to glimpse some of the beauty in idioms with complex shades.