

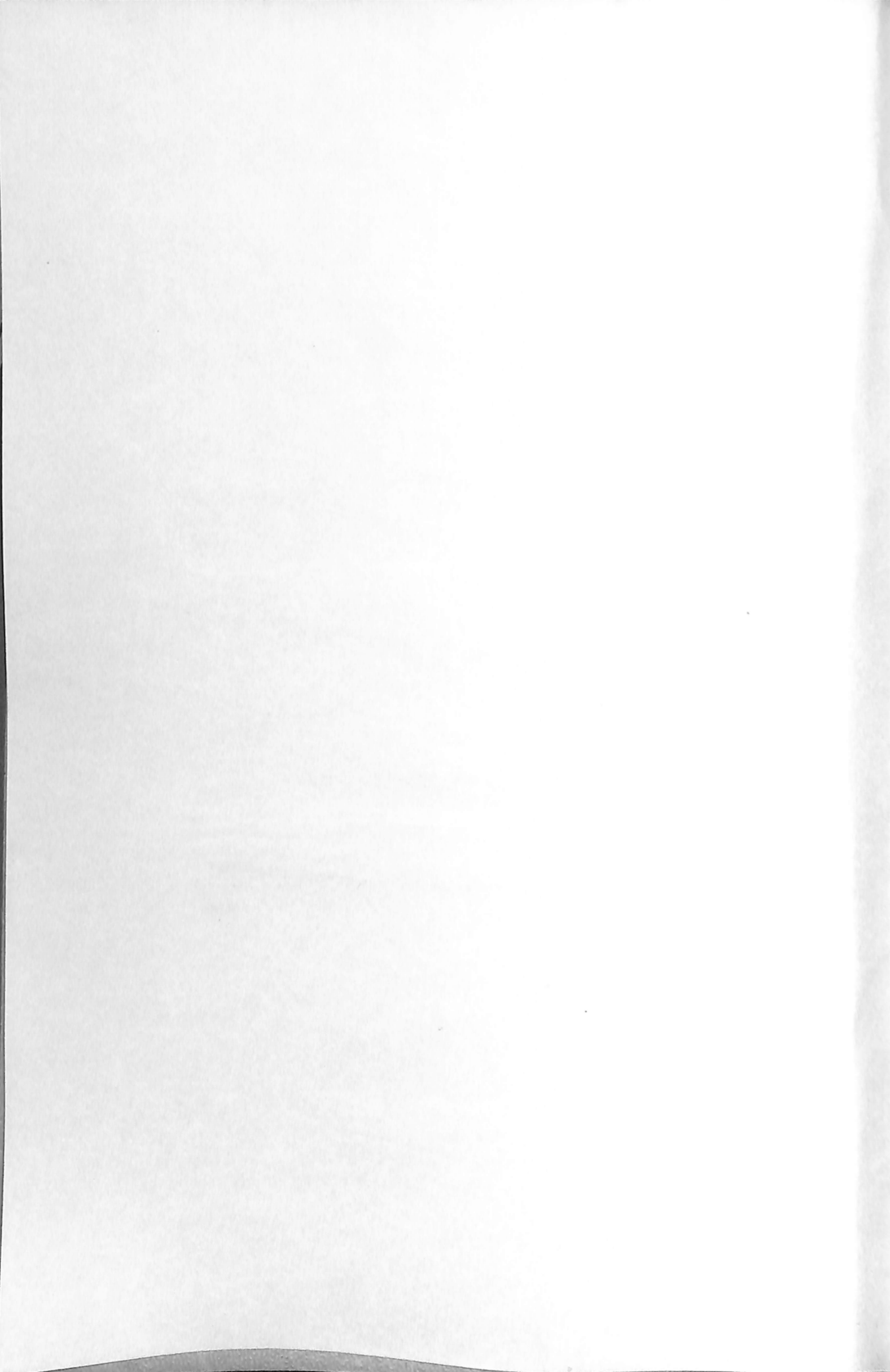
MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

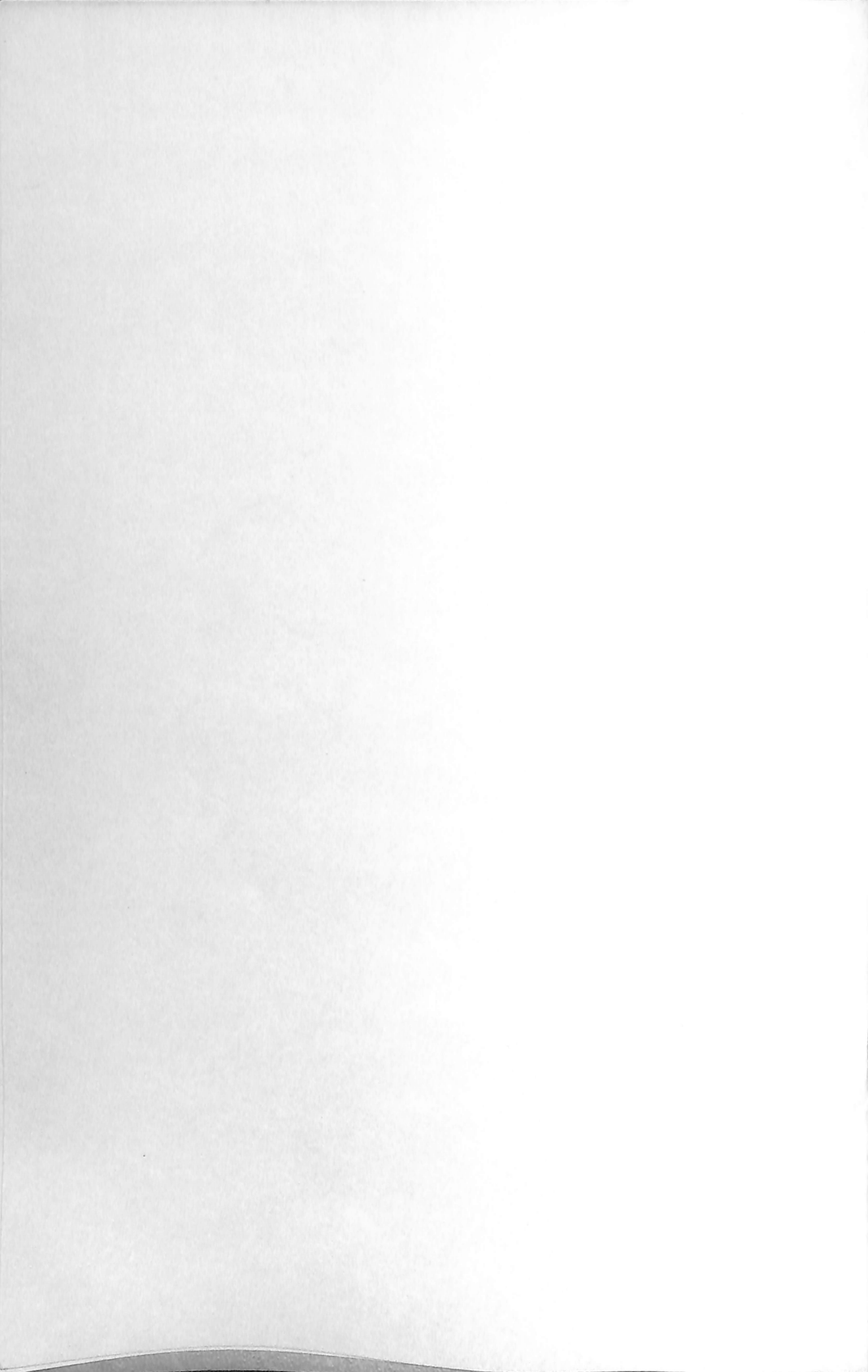
Rupa Bhavani

S.L. Sadhu



Sahitya Akademi





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Preface

The oldest chronicle of Kashmir now extant, the *Rajatarangini*, starts narrating events from around the Mahabharata war in which the then ruler of the area lost his life. A settled kingdom, Kashmir looked back another two millennia to the age when people lived at Burzahama, near the Dal Lake, to the east of Srinagar. Some sort of continuation in the life of the area appears to be traceable, directly or indirectly, since then. It would be logical to survey the growth of Kashmiri sensibility, life, thought and culture since the days of Burzahama settlement, though large areas of darkness are found in the extensive scenario. Comprehensive research is called for to establish salient milestones before reliable conclusions emerge.

Rupa Bhavani lived for about a hundred years in the 17th–18th centuries. It was a period when the Kashmiri language was still not out of the woods. During the two centuries, however, it acquired a clear-cut personality and character. Rupa Bhavani also played an important role in that process. A study of the growth of Kashmiri language over the centuries is helpful in assessing her contribution to the language.

A writer is indebted to his age for how it nourishes him/ her, the age being the treasure-house of what it has inherited from the past and the shape

Aids to Pronunciation

The approved Persio-Arabic script for Kashmiri makes it possible to represent almost all the sounds in the language as spoken today. The Devanagari script with a few diacritical marks/adaptations also is able to carry the sounds. There is, however, no typewriter in the market to assist a writer to transcribe all Kashmiri sounds in the Roman script. To bridge the gulf between the Kashmiri and the Roman alphabets some improvisations have been recommended/ accepted from time to time. Those who are not perfectly at home in Kashmiri are likely to feel some difficulty:

'a' as *u* sound in 'cut' permits us to use the form *an* for (i) food(b) bring, but without exercising extreme caution a reader is likely to pronounce it as 'an', one of the two indefinite articles. An apostrophe mark on 'a', i.e., *a'* is suggested to overcome the difficulty. Thus *a'n* () is 'food'; similarly, *a'ga'n* () is 'flame'.

Further details are :

- | | |
|----|--|
| a' | as in ta' (and)— <i>tsa' ta' bo'</i> (you and me) |
| a | as 'u' in 'cut'— <i>kas</i> (to whom), <i>ṭang</i> (a pear) |
| aa | as in 'father'— <i>vaav</i> (wind), <i>gaav</i> (a cow) |
| i | as in 'pit'— <i>nich</i> (thin, slender), <i>kis</i> (little finger) |
| ee | as 'i' in 'machine'— <i>teel</i> (oil), <i>sheen</i> (snow) |

u	as in 'put'— <i>kus mari</i> : (who can slay ?)
oo	as 'u' in 'rule'— <i>tsoor</i> (thief), <i>loor</i> (stick)
o	as in 'go'— <i>bo' gos</i> (I went)
o'	as in 'ko'l, (mute or inarticulate), <i>so'</i> (she)
ö	as in <i>köl</i> (stream or canal)
u	as in <i>su'</i> (he)
<i>tso'</i>	(you, thou)..... <i>tse</i> (to thee—plural : to' <i>hi'</i> and to' <i>hi'</i> in to' <i>hi'</i>)
t	as in time
d	as in drum

A few other illustrations :

oat: flour

äsi': we

äas: mouth

go' ga' ji': a turnip

tsä'nda'r: the crescent/ moon

tsoang: the traditional earthenware lamp

swöpun: dream

go'gji: turnips

Burza'hama* and After

To say when exactly our ancestors of the Burza'hama settlement flourished needs more study and research than has been accomplished so far; but they must have appeared after being fully convinced of the exit of Jalodbhava, the demon who infested the Satisar. In consideration of the fact that the Saptarishi/Laukik era started about 3077 years before Christ, Burza'hama settlement may have existed another two thousand years earlier. They selected a convenient upland for their habitat, fashioned their caves, low-lying shelters and their graves fairly beyond the risk of another inundation and laid the foundation of a new civilisation. Whether they spoke any language is not known, but they left for us their history in stones, bones, pottery, relics of their early forage into metallurgy and the like. These well-honed implements and clay models have a beauty of their own and give us a preview of the latest artistry of untold generations, especially the smooth needle made of bone, the mother of all the embroidery needles that for centuries have created efflorescence on the pashmina shawl covered shoulders of beautiful women all over the world.

*Burza'hama is located on the periphery of the Dal Lake a short distance from Shalimar. Valuable remains of an ancient settlement of the stone age were excavated there several decades back.

These people lived by hunting on land or in the numerous water-courses around, but gradually learnt to grow maize, paddy, barley, wheat and water-nuts. A dialect akin to what came to be known as Dardic also emerged. Whether some of them had contact with any fellow-humans across mountain-ranges to the north or the north-west cannot be asserted with certainty, but their later generations came to be known as *Paisacas* with a peculiar speech *Paisaci* which bore traces of Dardic dialect. *Paisaci* language is said to have thrown up later a great writer *Gunadhya*, creator of the fantastic *Brihat Katha* which disappeared into nothingness, but lives in various translations, including the Sanskrit versions of *Somananda*, *Kathasarita sagara* and, later, *Brihatkatha Manjari* of *Kshemendra*. *Gunadhya* himself is said to have burnt six lakhs of the verses composed by him for the book.

Another race named *Nagas* is supposed to have lived along with the *Paisacas*, or soon after their decline. The *Nagas* were, probably, more civilised than the *Paisacas*, as few unpleasant memories are associated with them. They lived near tarns, lakes and springs which carry the suffix *naga* along with their names: *Shisharamnag*, *Konsarnag* *Nilanag*, *Taksaknag*...Some tales, as of *Heemal and Naegrai*, depict them as being equally at home on land and in water. Some of the lakes and tarns carry the suffix 'sar', as *Tarsar*, *Maarsar*, *Satisar*, *Hokarsar*, while those ending in *nag* remind us of the possible link with the *Naga* predecessors. The surname 'Nag' in the form of 'Nagu' is still borne by individual *Kashmiris*. *Kashmiri* surnames often end with a 'u' sound, as in *Nehru*, *Braru*, *Kukilu*. *Nagu* thus has a

close affinity with Kashmiri names than with the Bengali 'Nag'.

Around this period, Aryans started trekking into the Indian sub-continent through the many routes in the north-western chain of mountains. Some scholars are of the view that an Aryan horde entered Kashmir *via* Chitral in the north-west at an earlier stage in the Aryan migration and established some settlements. Other hordes took a slightly southerly route and spotted the Indus river and the vast plains of the Panjab crisscrossed with numerous rivers. In a short while, the immigrants and the indigenous people merged together. Those who had settled in Kashmir absorbed many rites and customs of the Nagas and Paisacas.*

Changes in socio-cultural architecture needed centuries, if not millennia, to exhibit shape and character. Centres of civilisation flourished and decayed in different parts of the world. There must have been some confrontation between the immigrant Aryans and those who represented the Mohenjodaro, Dravid and other ancient Indian cultures. Nagas or Nagavamshis clashed with the Aryans in the plains of India. The imprint they left on the folklore is closely interwoven with the names of Parikshit, Janmejaya, Garuda, Kadu, Vanita, Vineeta and others. The settlement of the Aryans was a major phenomenon which brought the awareness of various philosophies and gods, both pre Aryan and Aryan to the notice of the people. Vedas, Upanishads and other scriptures had, already claimed attention. Some

* The *Nilamat Puran* and the *Rajatarangini* throw considerable light on such rites and customs. Many episodes in the latter chronicle highlight the conflict of the Nagas and other factions.

people hold the view that the *Rig Veda* had originated in Kashmir. In any case, intercourse between the Valley and the outer world was close and intimate. Sri Krishna came to Kashmir to install on the throne Rani Yashomati whose husband died in the Mahabharata war. Numerous place-names like Pampasar (now Pamba'sar), Sitaharan, Kaka'pore (after the crow Vasanta), Raja Ram Bhadrani Lari (mansions of Raja Ram, the good) Lakshman Tat, induce a willing suspension of disbelief against the sojourn of Ram, Sita and Lakshman in Kashmir during their exile.

Another cultural maelstrom was ushered in by the spread of Buddhism all over the sub-continent. Its extension was especially unassailable when Ashoka vowed to abstain from violence and sent envoys to all countries, carrying the message of the Tathagata. Kashmir had come under his suzerainty and developed into an outstanding centre of Buddhist learning along with others in Taxila, Nalanda, Bamian, Lhasa, Central Asia, and further east. In Kashmir itself, Harvan, Kanispore, Ushkara (Vushkor, or *Vasa'kur*), Kaanilvan attained eminence in the growth and spread of the Buddhist cult. Many Buddhist temples, shrines, convents and habitations grew up in the Valley, including a structure near the southern foot of the Shankaracharya hillock. Near the present Buchhivor sprang a habitation called Bodha'gam while Bodha'ger in downtown needs no introduction.

Buddhism came to Kashmir in the form of a cultural revolution when Buddhist savants and *bikshus* won the hearts of their Kashmiri hosts through disputation and discussion. Of their own

accord the Kashmiris embraced the new faith *en masse* under the influence of the fourth Buddhist Council convoked by Kanishka and some eminent Buddhist savants, including Ashvaghosha.

The people of Kashmir played a great role in spreading the message of the Buddha in India and abroad, but got disenchanted with the faith gradually. Perhaps, they missed the gaiety and fun of the earlier centuries, the attraction provided by the earlier shrines, the ceremonials and festivals as recorded in the *Nilamat Puran* with zest. The basic principle of Buddhism, viz., non-injury and vegetarianism also went against their grain as mutton and fish were not only eaten by them with relish but were also offered to deities. When there was a Hindu backlash in the sub-continent the influence of Buddhism eroded in the Valley and the old rites and customs regained their popularity. Around the fifth century A.D., Gopaditya, after whom the present Gupkar is known, offered incentives to outside Brahmins to settle down in the Valley. He built a *matha* for garlic-eating Brahmins at Buchhiwara and another *matha* at Gupkar for more orthodox Brahmins who abstained from eating garlic. Buddhism petered out from the Valley, though Kashmir maintained for many generations its reputation for Buddhist learning and eminent Buddhist scholars like Hieun Tsiang exchanged views and interacted with Kashmiri scholars. Apart from Srinagar, other centres like Vushkôr (Ushkara or Vasa'kur), and Bijbehara attracted his attention. Temples grew up and people went to various *nags* (tarns) and centres of Shakti worship with gusto. Among the shrines that gained or regained

prominence was Khirbhavani at Tulamula. Side by side, non vegetarian food occupied the pride of place in the kitchen. It was once again a silent revolution, but Kashmir continued to maintain its importance as a centre of learning, scholarship and spirituality, a land of sages and saints.

Lalitaditya's reputation as a great king and conqueror attracted from outside many scholars whose interaction with the local intellectuals and artists gave a fillip to art, architecture and learning. Ancestors of Abhinavagupta were drawn to the Valley around this time and they settled down here for good, as outstanding thinkers and writers were patronised with land grants for maintenance. This tradition continued for centuries. Kalhana provides a long list of eminent scholars in the courts of Lalitaditya's grandson Jayapida and Avantivarman. They included philosophers, poets, grammarians, authorities on art and aesthetics. Some of them held ministerial posts, among whom was one Damodargupta*, a writer of fiction in Sanskrit verse and minister to Jayapida.

During this era, beginning from the mid-eighth century, many outstanding thinkers and writers flourished in Kashmir and their reputation has not grown dim even by this time. They include Anandavardhana, Shivaswami, Kallatabhatta, Somananda, Somdeva, Abhinavagupta, and many others. This upsurge in the promotion of secular arts and learning is matched by the lofty heights attained in the

* Damodargupta does not appear to have been satisfied with the value-scale of his cohorts. In his eminent work *Kutinimatam*, he castigates them in the words: "If those living elsewhere don't know, they are not to blame; for Kashmiris, to whom saffron is easily available, also crave for indigo."

domains of philosophy, culture and allied disciplines. As a matter of fact, philosophy is mentally so comprehensive as to cover all activities including poetry, dramaturgy, aesthetics, arts, music, *dharma-shastra*, and even sciences—astronomy, astrology and justice. No apology, is therefore, needed to make a brief reference to the socio-cultural trends in the Valley after the decline of Buddhist dominance.

Among the most outstanding achievements of the Kashmiri intellect is Kashmir Shaivism. Shaivism flourished all over the sub-continent, especially the south. In a vast country like India the possibility of variations in emphasis in philosophical thought and rituals could not be ruled out, as was the case with Buddhism, but Kashmir Shaivism branched off more radically. This development is attributed to a sage Vasugupta (9th century) who lived near Harvan and claimed that Lord Shiva inspired him to propound his thesis.

Kashmir Shaivism, which is also known as the Trika (i.e. based on three principles), believes that the reality behind all the phenomena is Shiva, or, in other words, the phenomenal universe is the creation of Shiva, the Eternal Reality. He is immanent in everything living or non-living, moving or static. He is the pure consciousness, and the Absolute Reality. The basic nature of that Reality is to appear simultaneously in its transcendental as well as the phenomenal aspects. He causes creation, preservation, absorption, obstruction and revelation. He plays these roles through His Shakti which is the prime essence of His Godhead. The concept of God, the Supreme Power, in various religions is generally of a male. The gods in the Hindu pantheon—

Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and others—are accompanied by their consorts. Shiva the Ultimate Reality and his consort Parvati assume different forms, but Parvati is not separate from Shiva. The two are inseparable, just two aspects of one single Reality, The Mother Goddess feeds the creation with the elixir of *Ichha* and *Jnana* (Will and Supreme Knowledge) from her breasts, but she also protects them from danger. He (Shiva) is often represented as absorbed in meditation, but when the need arises His Shakti at once takes pre-emptive action for the welfare of the creation. She displays the compassion of a mother in responding to the prayers of the creation. Shiva displays His will to save the creation when He swallowed the poison *halahala* which would otherwise have destroyed the universe. He stepped in to save the creation when an *asura* (demon) having wrested a boon, was bent upon annihilating the cosmos. Notwithstanding this, Shiva is essentially good-natured and compassionate. His spouse Parvati embodies power and energy—the dynamic principles, but she is in no way separate from Him. She is the Shakti or the potency of the Lord. Hence the importance of the Mother-worship, which is as old, if not older, as the Indus Valley civilisation in India.

Successive Shiva philosophers elucidated the concepts of the faith with commentaries; and digests and its different aspects came to light. Somananda, who followed Vasugupta and propounded the *Pratyabhijna Shastra*, elucidated the philosophical concepts of his master. Besides being Immanent and the Ultimate Reality He is the embodiment of equality without the least distinction. He is everlasting consciousness and unlimited happiness. He enjoys absolute independence. He is seated in every heart, to quote the *Gita*:

*aham aatma, Gudakesa, sarva bhutesu tishtithah,
aham aadhi cha' madhya' cha', bhutanam a' nt
ev cha.'*

(Ch.x.5)

Maharshi Raman regards it as the most important *shloka* of the *Bhagavadgita*. If the Lord is seated in every heart, duality ceases to exist, and the distinctions of caste, creed and race have no basis.

Such discussions led to various concepts of thought, belief and conduct which were accepted and owned by the masses. The forms later known as Trika and Tantra also crystallised and attracted the attention of many people. Masters of Tantric philosophy include Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta. The philosophy lays emphasis on *yoga* as the highest means of self-realisation; but aspirants are advised to choose any system of practice that suits them to reach the goal, Trika being one of them. The trinity on which Trika rests comprises God (Shiva), His power (Shakti) and Nara, the soul or the world of souls. Shakti is the power, or path, through which God extends His grace to the soul, whenever He is pleased to do so, or, the soul, its limitations having been effaced, realizes himself as God and God alone. A practical realisation by the aspirant of his divine powers, like non-duality, omniscience omnipo-tence, etc., is the recognised means of attainment of his Godhead, and the Trika yoga facilitates his progress in this direction. A perfect *yogi* sees God in everything; in the noumenal, or *prakasha* aspect as Shiva, and in the phenomenal (pure intellectual intuition), or *vimarsa* aspect as Shakti. The most essential stage in the practice of Trika yoga is *Samavesh*, merger of the relative consciousness into the Absolute.

The Trika philosophy had profound influence on the day-to-day lives of the people in the Valley. The overwhelming influence of *Maya* received a setback and the common man drew satisfaction that it was not necessary to renounce the world so as to seek salvation. He felt convinced that he could seek the highest fulfilment while attending to his responsibilities as a householder. There was no need to be hypocritical and pretend to be a puritan. The *Panchastavi* projects the portrait of an average householder who practises what the Trika philosophy enjoins upon him:

"I do not seek anything from anybody, nor deceive anybody. I am not given to dejection. Clothing myself in fine garments I partake of delicious foods. I and my consort do not deny ourselves any legitimate pleasures of existence as a goddess, the fulfiller of all desires (in the form of Kula), are ever blooming in my heart."
(st.19, canto 3)

Shiva himself is regarded as an eternal family man. Shakespeare's observation mouthed by one of the numerous characters created by him—

"Does it mean, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

touches life more profoundly than one could expect from a stage actor. The Buddhists practised non-violence and the Vaishnavites maintained similar kitchen standards. The Jains went several steps further towards implementing the vow of non-injury to living creatures. The inhabitants of Kashmir have had a long as tradition of following other habits and their sacramental offerings included non-vegetarian foods. The Trika philosophy did not prohibit any

particular food, nor did it insist on anything special, as long as the food consumed did not stand in the way of one's aspiration for *samavesh*. God is an embodiment of independence and the Trika allows a good deal of independence to its followers in many matters and activities, provided an aspirant utilises them for continuous self discipline and self-improvement in the pursuit of his goal.

Emphasis on will, equality, independence and dignity of life came as a fresh breeze to the people whose minds and souls had been overburdened with obsolete rituals and beliefs. Will, intelligence and action enable man to attain all goals without bothering about fate. Shaivite philosophers hardly ever laid stress on idol worship but repeatedly emphasised self-introspection. They held that during one's sojourn on the earth the dust of illusion settles on the soul, or certain *karmas* (called *jnan avarniya karmas*) clouding its nascent nature stand in the way of its radiating luminosity. Persistent meditation and self-introspection help in sweeping away the dust and restoring the soul to its pristine purity. They laid emphasis on self-consciousness, purity of thought, word and deed. The *Panchastavi* counsels thus:

"O you ignorant beings, why do (some of) you profitlessly torment your bodies by extreme penance and austerity, and others impoverish themselves with (the drain of) heavy payments for religious ceremonies and sacrifices....?"
(st.18,canto III)

In her well-known *vakya—diva'vataa divar vataa.....* Lal ded says:

"The idol is made of stone and the temple too is made of stone. Whom would you worship, O Pandit ?"

These early exponents encouraged a large host of scholars to take a dip in the ocean of the trend-setting philosophy. Before long the world granted recognition to their contribution to the human mind and developing a new discipline that provides answers to many questions regarded baffling earlier. This philosophy also instilled courage into the hearts and minds of all thinking people and served to clear the atmosphere for further adventures in cultural emancipation.

It would be unfair to assume that Vaishnavism was totally neglected by the people. Among the ancient monuments are those of the temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu by kings, generation after generation. On the invitation of some of his disciples, the great Vaishnava leader Ramanuj (A.D., 1178–1250) visited the Valley almost two hundred years before Lalded was born; but his visit did not have the desired impact in terms of winning hordes of disciples. But the earlier traditions testified to a strong influence of the Vaishnava faith. The *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata* were held in great veneration and people regularly attended community readings in towns and villages from these works. One village in Handawara is named Bhagatpora because it was the community centre for recitations from the *Bhagavata*. Many places still carry their names from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Many families continue to bear the name Vaishnava or Vishin. King Avantivarman (A.D. 855–883) posed as a Shaivite all his life but confessed just before his demise that he was, in truth, a Vaishnava all along.*

* Kshemendra also sought conversion to Vaishnava faith: R. Dattatreya, *Kshemendra*—Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta-700 006.

In the course of a few generations, these developments created a throbbing in the hearts and minds of thinkers and writers who put their experiences into writing, generating a host of commentaries, expositions, digests, and further research. Secular writings like tales, history, fiction, aesthetics also received a fillip. Among those who held aloft the banner of scholarly writing in disciplines apart from philosophy and religion are Somadeva, Kshemendra, Kalhana, Damo-dargupta, Anandavardhana, Bilhana, Tautabhatta, Abhinavagupta, and a host of others. One of the central characters of Kshemendra's *Samyamatrika* appears to be the prototype of Shakespeare's Shylock (*The Merchant of Venice*).

Mystics are found in all countries and faiths. Kashmir had already witnessed the impact of mysticism from Buddhists. From the eleventh century onwards mystic thought from Egypt, Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Central Asia also began to waft towards Kashmir. During the early fourteenth century, Muslims seized political power which encouraged philosophers, scholars, poets and mystics, professing Islam, to visit Kashmir, carrying the message of Islamic thought and mysticism. Some of the outstanding exponents of Shaivism had, from time to time, openly expressed that idol worship was not necessary for progress towards the ultimate reality. Such trends made it possible for the Muslims to seek an exchange of views with the Hindus. While many among the latter got converted to Islam, some are said to have done so with the conviction that there is little difference between the two faiths in essentials: righteousness, respect for truth, honesty,

sincerity, equality among all human beings, and the existence of one God. This common approach is summed up in the verse:

*Hazrati Aad'mas aa's za' ga'bar,
A'ki' ra't aava'reni' ta' beiy ra't qa'bar.*

(The revered Adam had only two sons: one of them took recourse to the cremation ground while the other accepted the graveyard.)

Lalleshwari and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din took their birth amidst such an environment, though nearly six decades one after the other. Lalla was referred to as Lalleshwari or Lalded by the Hindus while the Muslims preferred to address her as Lalla Aarifa (respected Lalla who had sighted the truth). The Sheikh was referred to as Nunda' Reosh (Nunda' Rishi) out of affection, Noor-ud-Din being telescoped to Nunda' in Kashmiri. But his appropriate name was Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani, Alamdari-i-Kashmir. To Hindus he appeared so close emotionally; and on account of his teaching they addressed him as Sahzanand/Sahajanand (the ultimate reality) as though he belonged to their own faith. The sensibility of the subsequent generations in Kashmir bears the imprint of both these stalwarts. Lalded counselled:

*"Shiv chhuy tha' li tha' li rozan, mo zaan Hyound
ta' M'salman....."*

[—Shiva is present in every particle of the universe... Do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim. Search your heart to know yourself. That indeed will lead you to the Master.]

Some observations made by Lalded indicate her experiences and teachings:

My *Guru* summed up his instruction in a single

axiom, viz., to divert my attention from the outer world to the inner reality.

Basil cannot lose its fragrance, neither can you obtain camphor from the hide of a dog...

Don't imagine it is difficult to exterminate greed, or to meditate upon the ultimate reality. He stands by your side, not far away. Nothing merges into nothingness.....

If you focus your attention on the mind, you can give it the right direction by a slight effort. Otherwise, your (*this*) jackal's howl is of no avail!...

After burning the six woods (of lust, anger, greed, illusion, ignorance and ego) I awakened the *shashikala* (the digit of the moon), and grilled my heart on the embers of love. Thus it is that I sighted Shankara.

The Sheikh never tired of exhorting:

Aanga'na'naad karaan hoonu Vav ba vav ta'
lone ba lone

[—The dog in the courtyard always reminds us that one reaps only what one sows.]

His teachings are as basic as that, and easy enough even for a child to grasp. Elsewhere, his counsel is equally profound, though couched in a few simple words:

kroodh no Musalmanas pazey (A Muslim should not lose temper)

Nunda Rishi observed:

Ah me! My very self has killed me! He remains hidden in the dark;

Would that he fell into my hands; I would kill him with a sword!

The self is a bull, yoke him to the plough,
If you chastise him with the stick of fasting, He will set the plough moving.

He who toils in the spring will surely harvest the grains in autumn.

Change from one ruling race or house to another can never be milkwhite. Persecution and bloodshed dominated the first two decades of the fifteenth century. But, soon after, when he came to the throne in A.D.1420, Zain-ul-Abidin applied balm to the injured hearts. He invited Hindus to return home from exile, patronised them and encouraged them to pursue their learning. His tolerance for all faiths and patronage for poets, scholars, masters in music, arts and crafts attracted talented people from different lands which resulted in a renaissance.

Zain-ul-Abidin created wonderful precedents in bringing the Hindus and Muslims emotionally together, but could not close the gulf between his own sons. He felt insecure and miserable as he entered the fifth decade of his reign. Nevertheless, his name and deeds continue to inspire the people.

Sheikh Noor-ud-Din is said to have taken his flight to heaven in A.D.1440. He frequently gave utterance to his thought and teachings in *shrukhs* (term derived from *shloka*), a rhymed verse-stanza of four lines. In one of these he saluted Lalla:

Tas Padmanporichi Lalley.....

(Hail to Lalla of Padmanpore (present Pampore)

She quaffed nectar in a draught,

Our revered prophet is she,

O God! grant me boons as she enjoyed!)

During his life of discipline and penance he attracted many disciples who lived a life of labour and piety in their effort to overcome the ego. They were called *rishis*, and an order of *rishis* came into being spontaneously. Their presence kept alive the

torch lit by the Master and they had considerable influence in guiding the people to righteousness. The *rishis* lived simple lives, tried to chastise desire and temptation, wore coarse woollens and wooden sandals, planted fruit trees, laid emphasis on tolerance, equality irrespective of caste and creed, service of the common people, and the like. Many of them abstained from non-vegetarian foods. Though they lived far away from congested quarters, they were visited by scores of people who sought their guidance. While war-lords and desperadoes continued to brandish swords to drench the earth with blood, these *rishi* ascetics, even when hungry or shivering in cold, did not withhold their helping hand. Thousands of people pay their homage to them even now at distant places where they are laid to rest. The impact of these pious men has been deep and pervasive.

The earlier account of the renaissance inspired by the creative sensibility of Zain-ul-Abidin, *alias* Budshah, this era would remain incomplete without a reference to the upsurge in Kashmiri language and poetry. While education was provided through the medium of Persian and Sanskrit, Budshah laid down that the best medium for the purpose is the mother-tongue. The perceptive intelligentsia took the hint: Shrivara, who was a versatile scholar, composed poetry in Kashmiri also. It is said that Nunda Rishi's mother Sa'-dra' Maa' j, his wife Zaided and his son Haider too composed verses in Kashmiri. Utta Soma (Soma' Pandit) composed poetry in Kashmiri, including *Zaina' Charita*, a biography of the king. Baba Nasr-ud-Din and Baba Bam-ud-Din are also credited with having composed poetry in the mother tongue. Bhattavatar, who remembered Firdausi's

Shahnama verbatim, wrote *Zaina'*. *Avatar* in Kashmiri. He also authored *Banasur Vadh* in Kashmiri about the romance of Usha, daughter of the demon king Banasur, with Aniruddha, grandson of Sri Krishna.

Within a few decades of Zain-ul-Abidin's death, disorder was on the rise along with violence and incendiarism. One fine morning a courtier belonging to the Tsak clan lifted the ceremonial headgear of the king, Habib Shah, placed it on his own head and occupied the throne. Despite an apparent semblance of might in the new king the people suffered. Warlords and desperadoes ruled the roost and intolerance was rampant. Prajabhatta cautiously withdrew from chronicling the events in succession to Shrivara. The sixteenth century threw up Haba Khatoon, queen of Yusuf Shah and empress of Kashmiri song and poetry. Others who wrote verses in Kashmiri, mostly *vatsan* and love songs, included Habib Ullah Newshehri (songs), Juma' Bibi (elegies), and Shia composers in the elegiac form. Among the latter Mir Hassan (15th century) has caught the mood of the people in reaction to the holocaust let loose by the fierce invader Zulchhu in the elegy:

Bhagwaana' a'si karta' pan'ni da'ya,
Zulchhu kreedat sund bhaiya Kaas!

[—O God! Out of compassion spare us the dread of the fierce Zulchhu!]

Other elegies include the one beginning:

Khanjar gav tyo'k ka'rithai Imam Hussain' ni ra'
tai!

[—The sword has emerged with the auspicious mark of the blood of Imam Hussain!] or

A-si tsaji' na' laar zanh ti

Saani hantsi khaana' khoda a'yi ti zaalna' aav!

[—We have always been at the receiving end. Accusing us they have torched God's own house!]

Many Kashmiris gained recognition in the use of Persian, including Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri, Sheikh Yaqub Sarfi, Mulla Daud Khaki, Gani Kashmiri, Chandra Bhan Brahman, and Lakshmi Dhar Saroor. Many tales from Persian and Arabic sources like Laila Majnoon, Shirin Farhad, Rustum and Sohrab, Yusuf Zulaikha, were rendered into Kashmiri verse. Saheb Kaul, a contemporary of Rupa Bhavani, also wrote verses in Kashmiri, exhibiting a remarkable artistic craftsmanship, as in *Kalpa Vrakshsh*.

Ardent followers of Trika Shaivism, Islamic mysticism, saints, *derveshes*, and *rishis* endeavoured over the centuries to purify the moral-intellectual environment in the land and wipe away the dark cobwebs of duality and discriminatory mentality. Apart from those already mentioned, this is exemplified in the lives of later saints like Shivram Jalali (Brari Aangan), Mirza Kak (Hangal gö'nd), Reshi Pir Pandit Padshah, Jiwan Saheb (Rainawari) among the Hindus. Outstanding divines who were attracted to the land included Bulbul Shah, Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, Sheikh Ghulam Qadir Jeelani, and many others who took abode in different regions and *parganas*. Sultan-ul-Aarifin Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom is among the tallest of the saints born in the Valley. Their teaching is summed up in a few words: "God is One and all men and women are His offspring. Our thoughts, words and deeds should exhibit this spirit of unity, fraternity and brotherhood." The stream of nectar continued to nourish the land and threw up in later centuries such

poets and masters as Shamas Faqir, Paramanand, Ahmad Bata'wari', Rahim Saeb, Krishna Razdan, Samad Mir, Nyama' Saeb, Ahad Zargar, Zinda Kaul.

A few samples of their thoughts and feelings are given below:

Akbar Dar:

S'ra' kar pan'nui paan' Thokur vuza' naavun

(Assess your own potentialities and awaken the deity within.)

Ra'him Saeb:

Shash van tro'parith shashkal vuzan

(Shashikala is awakened after the six woods of desire, anger, greed, illusion, lust and the ego are extirpated....The heat generated by controlled breathing burns all dross.)

Ra'him Saeb:

Tha' ri chhai pana'ni tshai

Tshai chhai dilich rai

(Your own shadow stands in the way of attaining the ultimate reality, and the shadow consists of desires and fancies....)

Shamas Faqir:

Kenh ga'i waa'ka'f....

(A few have come within sight of the Truth, but many wallow in ignorance. Some find the door opened for them. Try to know yourself.)

Nyaama' Saeb:

S-ni'ta' voga'ni' va'ni ditaeme' tshand' tas...

(I roamed up and down in His search till I recalled He bears the same name as I.)

The Kashmiri Language

As indicated earlier, scholars claim to have found some evidence of the origin of the Kashmiri language in the dialects known as Paisaca, Shina and Dardic* that are believed to have been prevalent in the north-western areas of the sub-continent. Later, it came under the influence of Aryan, Indo-Iranian and Sanskrit languages. Buddhist savants wanted to reach the masses through the local mother tongue and could not; but they have influenced the spoken language in Kashmir which is believed to have absorbed other words and structures. Such an approach was fruitful as large masses in the Valley embraced the Buddhist faith by conviction, and Kashmir retained for several centuries its importance as a centre of Buddhist philosophy, religion and culture. Came the Prakrit and Apabramsh phases and, later, the upsurge in the creative works in the 7th–8th and the succeeding centuries; but whether Kashmiri was used in writing, there is nothing on record to support it.

The earliest evidence of written Kashmiri is recorded by Kalhana while giving an account of the reign of Chakravarman (A.D. 936–37). The expression

* "Kashmiri seems to be a Dardic language very heavily impregnated with borrowings of Apabhramsa of the north-west of India." (Professor Macdonald).

comprises just three words: *Ra'ngisui helu' dinna*, meaning 'to Ranga (the village) Helu (is) given.' Ranga was a *dom(b)a* singer who secured this largesse as a token of appreciation. It is believed Kalhana used this expression with a slant to make fun of the tendency in common people to speak like the highbrow.

Generations of Kashmiri intellectuals bewail the indifference of writers, scholars and rulers towards promoting the mother tongue as medium of writing, especially during a thousand years when they commanded respect all over the country for their creative writing in Sanskrit and, later, in Persian. Their grievance has to be regarded in the light of the fact that late from the seventeenth century onwards, Kashmiri Persian scholars translated into their mother tongue romances and verse-tales from Persian and Arabic sources that have not only been a popular entertainment for the masses and a medium of their education but also the means of enriching the Kashmiri language as a whole. Romantic tales, like *Himaal and Naegrai*, or the allegory of *Aka'nandun*, though on the tip of every tongue, were not put into writing in the language of the people till the nineteenth century. What is worse, the only extant copy of the *Ratnakar Puran*, believed to have been a source of tales and romances, was lost a hundred years back when, it is said, the pony carrying the papers, along with the only Persian translation of the *Puran*, slipped into the river Sindh in the Valley.

In the phalanx of the eminent Sanskrit writers stands the name of the 11th/12th century polymath

Kshemendra*. He wrote, among others, a book under the title *Lok Prakash* (Light of Common Usages) which throws light on the activities of the common man in social circles, the market place, offices and courts. Many words from the Kashmiri language are strewn through the pages of this work. It is, however, said that after the demise of the master, for many generations scribes extended the original work and *Loka Prakash* does not really represent the 12th century form of the Kashmiri language. Kshemendra makes reference to *Desh Bhasha* which is interpreted as a popular Kashmiri dialect in the written form.** There was, however, no question of the *desh bhasha* attaining the status of a court language. With the assumption of power by Muslims, Persian attained that distinction.

A second reference to '*Rangisui helu dinna*' would not be irrelevant. We find the form in the *shrukhs* of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. '*Rangas*'(to Ranga) is current even now. The noun *Helu* would probably be pronounced as 'Heol' or 'Hyol' locally in our times but in the *shrukhs* of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din we find emphasis added to similar words, or nouns, by elongating the last vowel sound into 'oo', as *hoon* (dog) into *hoonu*:

* Kshemendra compiled a valuable manual *Loka Prakash* containing a collection of writings from various sources. It contains such words in common use as *dār dalav* (timber), *labh* (wall), *kolafa* (lock), *danari* (green grocer), *khavasa* (khah or farmland), *tsav* (offspring), *petravun* (to maintain, feed), *vaan* (shop), *vanguj* (tenant in a house), *d' khi'jal* (well-to-do), *d'sil* (mason), *kandur* (baker), *nendayem* (weeding), *achhadana* (temporary roof), *ujjama* (*wōzum*:loan), *band* (pawn). Some of the words are virtually in the form in which we find them today.

Rupa Bhavani by Som Nath Pandit, Deptt. of Kashmiri; Kashmir University.

** *Kashmiri Zabaan Aur Shairi* by Abdul Ahad Azad.

*Aangana naad karaan hoonu
Vav baa vav ta' lon ba lon*

(From the courtyard the dog instills into our ears that we are bound to reap what we sow). Some other words include: 'vanoo' (shopkeeper), 'osoo' (was), 'chonu' (yours). Such practice could have been inherited much earlier than the days of Ranga (10th century).

Patron stars of written Kashmiri language dawned in the fourteenth century with the arrival of Lalded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Lalded was preceded by two precursors: Shiti Kanth and Siddha Shri Kanth (alias Sedha Mol). Shiti Kanth of the 13th century was a devoted Shaivite whose extant work *Mahanay Prakash* (Monumental Effulgence) comprises 94 *vaaks* (rhymed stanzas). The *vaaks* of this Tantric work are adorned with Sanskrit Apa'bramsha words. A sample is given here:

*Gur mukh tse yad phalti vato
Kath puzan sankam avivadai
Akh kalu rakak padi yato
Tsod yuse pooz na maryada*

[—If you enjoy the favour of the Guru, the hairsplitting regarding the focus of meditation ceases. If you follow just one step indicated by him, there is no need to waste time with fourteen elements.]

The stanza displays rhyme *ab, ab*, though old Kashmiri usually did not have rhyme.

Siddha Shrikanth of the fourteenth century was the Guru of Lalded. The following verses are attributed to him:

Kath hyu na prakash kuney....

[—What is unparalleled in effulgence? What shrine

bestows the maximum merit ?.....

Who is the supreme among relations? What bestows the greatest comfort ?]

Lalded has made many references to her Guru in her *vaakhs*. But there is very little evidence of his own composition, though Shiti Kanth's philosophy and language had immense impact on Lalded.*

It has to be borne in mind that though a translation of the *Bible* was accomplished earlier, Kashmiri prose is, by and large, a creation of the post-1947 era. Kashmiri verse was in composition for several centuries earlier. In view of the paucity of specimens in Kashmiri language in earlier ages, there is some justification for a few quotes of Lalded and her younger contemporary Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Lalded:

Aami päna' sädras naavi chhas la'maan....

[—My effort in seeking the eternal reality is frail as though I were tugging a boat with raw untwisted thread across the stream. Would that the Lord heard my plaint and pulled me across !]

Go'ran vo'nnam kunui vatsun, nebrä dopnam andar atsun....

[—My Guru gave me one brief guideline, viz., to turn my back on the outer world and to focus my attention within.]

*Deivä vatäa divar vataa, heri bönä chhui kunoi vaath,
Pooz kasoo karakh huta' Bätäa, kär manas ta pavanäs sangath.*

[—The idol is made of stone, the temple is also made

* Lalded : J.L. Kaul; Sahitya Akademi.

of stones mortised together. Whom would you worship, O Pandit! Seek your identity with the inner breath.]

*Māl vōndhi zolum, jigar morum, teli Lal naav
dram yeli'd'li' traāvi' mas ta'ti'*

[—I burnt the dross in my mind, and eradicated the unsuited tendencies in my heart. Having made my total surrender to the Lord I attained the name Lalla!]

*Gagan tsäi, bhutal tsäi, tsäi chhukh den, pawan
ta' raath*

[—Thou art the firmament, thou the world, and thou day, air and the night. Thou art the rice used in worship, sandalwood, flowers and water for the ceremonial bath of the idol. Thou alone being everything, what can one offer thee in worship ?]

Lalla's diction is close to common speech, but selective and more refined. Her words are spontaneous, her metaphors are sharp and her imagery graphic: *I am tugging the boat with an unspun and untwisted string*. She had, no doubt, watched heavy boats tugged upstream with ropes of cotton or hemp, but the concept of 'raw and unspun thread' transforms the image from its material composition to an ethereal perception of one struggling against the current with nothing but hope and faith to depend upon.

Few of her metaphors have lost any of their force or sharpness today despite the gulf of nearly seven centuries: *Ka'han gaav rava'ni'*: 'as many as eleven persons failing to trace a cow gone astray' (the eleven stand for the ten *indriyas* and the mind). This last

instance points to a characteristic of Kashmiri poetry, viz., the abundance of medial rhyme. In the present case *gaav*, a cow, and *raav*, getting astray or lost) rhyme together. All poets use this ornamentation lavishly, but with ease.

A few other illustrations are:

Naabād baa'rus atti gänd dyöl gom

[—the knot securing the package of crystal sugar to my shoulder has loosened—indicating the alarming probability of the precious substance getting mixed up with dirt and dust on the ground, a nerve-shaking apprehension!]

Seki lävar va'ṭhani' (the futile attempt to cast sand in the shape of a binding medium, as is the case with grass or soft twigs. *Hächvi haärinji petsiv kaan gom* (a wooden bow and a stalk of rush grass for an arrow).

Yus hära' traävith gharä ghära kärey
Adä suy märi tä maarn tas.

[—He who forsakes repeating Hara's name and seeks petty selfish ends, verily he shall invite his end and be done to death.]

The medial rhyme *härä, härä, ghärä ghärä* is noticeable.

The spontaneity of her thought, the imagery and metaphor minted in her mind and the universality of appeal, insistence on truth and the eternal reality marks her as the first prominent composer of poetry in Kashmiri during the period beginning with A.D.1300. Her *vaakh's* have a musical quality also, and musicians and songsters have entertained audiences through the centuries. She is believed to have had a sound understanding of Trika yoga and has been unique in its practice.

Lalded has exercised deep influence on the common people, poets, philosophers, and seekers of truth. Her younger contemporary Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani offered to her his homage thus:

*Tas Padmaanporichi Lalley, Ta'mi galey amrit
pivvaä....*

[—Hail to her, Lalla of Padmaanpore (modern Pampore) who quaffed nectar without measure ! She is verily a messenger of God—*avatar*. O God, would that I were gifted with such a boon !]

Three hundred years later Rupa Bhavani acknowledged her as her *param guru*: (supreme mentor).

It is said that at his birth Sheikh Noor-ud-Din did not suckle Sadra'maāj. Lalded was somewhere around. She put the infant to her breast, saying:

*zenä yeli nä mandächhok, chnä kyazi chhukh
mändächhaan!*

[—If thou didst not mind taking birth, why dost thou shy away from drawing nourishment?] The infant heeded the advice immediately. Whatever the authenticity in the statement, the Sheikh chalked for himself a career closely resembling that of his first 'foster mother'. The main events of his life and teachings have already been hinted at. He gave expression to his feelings and teachings in *shrukhs* (or *shlokas*): four-lined rhymed stanzas, closely resembling *vaakhs*. These *shrukhs* reveal his spiritual eminence, his feelings, his wisdom, his selflessness, his discipline and his urge for uplifting people mentally and morally. He draws his diction from all walks and activities of life: agriculture (ploughing, preparing the soil and harvesting), weaving, etc. Many of his verses are instinct with an

allegorical meaning:

Näfas chhu hakhur, gandun aalas:

[—the ego is a mutinous calf, yoke it to a plough.]

Yus käri göngul sui käri kraar

[—He alone deserves to celebrate the harvest festival who shows his mettle in preparing the soil for sowing the seed]

His metaphors are forceful and his imagery catching. He has used a higher percentage of words that had gained currency earlier, many of them being of Sanskrit origin: *daayak* (adviser), *putsey* (for the sake of), *haayuk* (a large weighing scale), *rivaan* (weeping), *aadana'* (youth), *äla' ka run* (to shake up), *oatä* (weavers' reed implement for beating up weft), *chhaanpun* (a sling to hurl a stone with), *khäga* (bird), *gorum*, *brämun* (to err), *bish* (sit), *divä* (God), *vär* (boon), *kandi'* (body), *hiyi käandi'* (body delicate as a jasmine flower), *saavdaan* (alert), *kesri van* (a forest infested with leopards), *tsetä kesär* (the mighty lion of the ego). His prayer to God is expressed in the *shrukh*:

*Sö, Lukäbhävanäch kaji, Akäji ka'rnai sivaä,
So'ati' janavaran tsaji Tim vär ditam Divä*

[—That mute woman of Lokäbhavan—near Dooru, Anantnag—rendered service selflessly; ultimately she flew away with the birds; O God! grant me a boon as that!]

The normal rhyme scheme here is ab, ab, but the insertion of the word *akäji* (single-mindedly with undivided attention, or selflessly) at the beginning of the second line is a master stroke both because of its rhyme (a) as also for the energy packed in the sense.

Another well-known *shrukh* presents a graphic thumb-nail sketch of a penitent:

Aārut sār ta sangar lange
Aārut veeri mange tāng

[—A truly penitent seeker scours over hills and dales and seeks the impossible as a pear from a willow]. The last expression pregnant with meaning as it is, adorns the common speech even after six hundred years since it was minted.

The Sheikh exhorts his listeners in the verse:

H'da gatshi rätun, made' gatshi waalun
Veh gatshi tsalun, ta'wai atse zi grände

[—Keep the ego within bounds, drain it of passion, bear the blistering poison; then only can you enter the ranks of the selected few.] Fighting or curbing the ego is as hard as nursing blisters caused by deadly poison.

He is not unaware of the stark ironies of life:

Khanän händen yiman robäkhanan,
Sönda'rai vuchhmäkh latshh duvaan.

[—I have seen charming beauties sweeping dust and rubbish in the mansions of Khans, men of power.]

Languages continue modifying their forms and their pronunciation. After the Norman conquest of Britain, the English language underwent transformation. As a minor example we find that in the age of Chaucer the letter 'e' at the end of a word was stressed (e.g., 'cottage' was pronounced as 'cöttajay'). In the *shrukhs* of the Sheikh we find such words as *hoonu* (now *hoon*, i.e., dog, *vaanu* (*voöni*'—shop-keeper), *oasu* (*oas*, was).

Sheikh Noor-ud-Din left for his eternal home in A.D.1438. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin is said to have been one of the pall-bearers for some distance. Lal ded had concluded her earthly career half-a century earlier. The Sultan patronised scholars, poets, artists and writers. While the actress Tara could give a demonstration of forty-nine emotions, the Kashmiri language produced a few writers including Shrivara, Uttasoma (*Zainacharitra*: a biographical account of the king), Baba Bam-ud-din, Baba Nasr-ud-din and many others. Shama' Bibi, a disciple of Sheikh Noor-ud-din, laments his passing away thus:

Assi Sänz gäv surgas mato
Nunda' Sänz gäv surgas mato....

(O death, our S' nz has gone to heaven, Nund'a Sänz has gone to Heaven, O death !)

The Sheikh's ancestors came from the Sain clan of Kishtwar. 'Sain' suffered a change to become 'sänz'.

The peoples' theatre known locally as *Bhaandä päthär* continued to enrich the people's language. *Bhaand* is derived from the Sanskrit root meaning exhibiting folk, depending for its effect on irony and satire, while '*paäthar*' stands for the satirical drama. Indigenous guilds are believed to have entertained rural audiences for centuries. Though their activities have not attracted the attention of the learned, these publicly-performing persons thrived on raw humour, ventriloquism, rural diction and pronunciation. Mention in this connection has also been made of *Banasur Vadh*, a verse romance composed by Bhattavatara, a contemporary of Zain-ul-Abidin. The romance projecting the love of Usha, daughter of

Banasur, for Aniruddha, grandson of Sri Krishna, introduces dialogues:

*Chhuchho naat az naakar smit aenai maarni
Khenay pash bukra, pya, maa gatsh maarnai**

Usha, Banasur's daughter, entreats Aniruddha, after having heard the thundering war-cry of Banasur's force, "please stay away from the battle as together they will kill you....I'll strangle myself to death. Life of my life, don't go to the battle; they will kill you...."

Such words as 'shunith' (modern 'boozith', having heard); 'kaakht' (having said), 'piev' (drink) appear in the work.

A specimen from *Sukh Dukh Chariträ* of Bhatta Prashashta Kankä: 'Boz säkhaa apras prutsh undi. Labä lägän samai parimane [—go my friend and inquire from the time-keeper the exact time so that I draw up a horoscope].

This composition has for its theme "How to live a reasonably happy life." It is believed to have been written during the reign of Sultan Hassan Shah (A.D. 1472–84). It appears to have had some significance as social stability eroded soon and much disorder followed. Despite the insistence of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin that there is no better medium of education than the mother-tongue, creative and literary activities suffered a set-back, so much so that Prajabhatta put a stop to chronicling contemporary events started by Jonaraja and continued by his own mentor Shrivara. During this period, however, the exercise in recording the *shrukhs* of Sheikh Noor-ud-

*Rupa Bhavani: S.N. Pandit

din by his admirers continued. A few of the *vaakhs* of Lalleshwari are also believed to have been recorded in *Noornama*, probably under the impression of belonging actually to the *shrukhs* species of the Sheikh.

A cursory study of the *vaakhs* and *shrukhs*, of Lalded and the Sheikh, respectively, reveals that the *vaakhs* appear closer to the present-day language than the *shrukhs*, even though Lalded is believed to have passed away when the Sheikh was only an infant. This apparent contradiction is caused by the fact that the *shrukhs* of the Sheikh were put into writing probably in his own lifetime, or soon thereafter, and the words and diction retain their original form. The *vaakhs* of Lalded were committed to memory by interested people, by those who appreciated her teachings, by folk singers, or even by *kirtan* choirists, but not put into writing.

Spoken words are likely to suffer change in pronunciation, or a person who cannot understand the significance of the original, and makes a modification unwittingly, or deliberately. The *vaakhs* continued to remain close to the spoken word generation after generation till they were recorded for the first time.

During the next, i.e., sixteenth century the *bhakti-sufi* sensibility suffered a setback. Renunciation of family life lost its appeal. Elegies came to be composed under the influence of the Shia faith. The most important outcome of these interactions was the evolution of the love-song in Kashmiri. Habib Ullah Nowshehri (A.D. 1555–1618) attained popularity through his *vatsan* songs:

Räsa völäi völäi sundäry
Mas khaäs .hai bäri'mai tsei

[—O beauty of mine, deign to come—on the sly—;
Inebriating cups are awaiting thee.]

In such songs lover being male, the lover is a male. Sensuousness oozes from such songs, e.g., *Ts'nani' poshi ranga* (the lady with a complexion of the peach flower shade) her lips resembling the coral and her teeth veritable peaches...)

It was Haba Khatoon who took the century by storm through her songs charged with emotion, the pangs of separation, spontaneity, picturesque imagery, music and minstrelsy:

Nesäf raatan bär wa'thi' traävi' mai
Saathaa yikhnaa tsei

[—At midnight I threw open my doors; wouldst thou deign to come for a while? What has cooled your love for me? Wherefore this estrangement?]

“I am not comfortable amidst my in-laws....My mother-in law by the hair me jerked,
but worse than death was the knock....”

“He peeped at me from over the wall,
I long to drape him in a *tosha* shawl !
What for is he peeved thus?
His buxum lover, I long for him.”

The lady poses as the lover. The rhyme scheme of the original is ab, ad.

Haba's songs are plaintive. She adorned the palace of the sovereign, Yusuf Shah Chak (*Tsak*)—A.D. 1578–85 who had discovered her singing while working at her farm. The times, however, were uneven and Yusuf suffered many ups and downs till he voluntarily made his submission to the Mughal King Akbar in A.D. 1586. He left his subjects, his home and his Haba. She had, therefore, every reason to bewail her separation in songs and dirges:

For what fault of mine has he forsaken me,
Backtalk sharp as a scythe tears me apart!

Her *vatsan* songs are enriched with mellifluous music, scintillating imagery and local colour*.

Summed up in a few words Haba's entire experience of life is akin to the conclusions drawn by others whose role was less glamorous:

My shop was brimful with its stock,
And the world mad for a look-in,
The precious wares exposed,
The prices crashed,
As the day, alack! sank in the west.

Her songs indicate that many words in the language had already the present shape:

tsäsith (jampacked), *nundäbone* (charming),
maäri'mönd (beautiful), *mus khaösi'* (cups
brimful with inebriating drink), *gösa'* (pet,
annoyance), *tosä pomb'r* (a tosha shawl), *möl gos
va'sith* (prices crashed), *sabaqas traavun* (put in
a school), *vöga'* (skylight)....

Juma' Bibi was a junior contemporary of Habib Ullah Nowshehri. She maintains a light touch in her love-songs:

Come, do come to me, O friend,
On a slight pretext, alack, I slipped out,
O thou unmatched in form, for thee,
Thou heed my plaint and come,
A day will dawn no more I be,
What good is that to thee or me!

* Haba had received some education in her childhood and was familiar with Persian. An accomplished musician in Kashmiri and Persian, she set the tunes for many songs which are popular even now. Accomplished *Sufiana* masters as well as folksingers attract sizable audiences, even uninvited, when they make a display, each in his/her own way, of her songs.

Another writer of the period, Sahib Kaul (b.1629), is known for two of his verse compositions in Kashmiri, viz., *Kalpa Vraksha*, and *Zanma Chariträ*. The former is a work of literary craftsmanship patterned on words from Kashmiri, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Punjabi and Ladakhi, juxtaposed together artistically, ending with :

*Saheb Kaula', haa mutwaalä, (poshan) maalä.
karo yo*

[—Let me make garlands of flowers for you, Saheb Kaul, deeply dedicated as you are.]

Zanma' (or, *Janma'*) *Charitra*, the next Kashmiri work (Saheb Kaul wrote several works in Sanskrit on Yoga, philosophy,...) carries the refrain: '*Aayas Yendrani gara' yi tä'* (I have come to Indra's mansion) mentions many local places in a sort of travelogue. It offers the advice: "What is there one cannot attain through the service of the Guru? It can enable us to cross the ocean of existence."*

Five centuries of the cultural life in Kashmir were dominated by an equal number of poets, four of them women. Every one of the foursome: Lalded, Haba Khatoon, Rupa Bhavani, and A'rnimaal, had undergone the wedding ceremonial but none was destined to live a happy married life, or have children. The fifth Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, though a recluse, declined to turn his back upon his wife, Zaided, and children. He countered a suggestion in this behalf in the stanza:

*keeväl köt neyrakh tanhaa yi traavith shur' muri'
ta garä baar, yim käs baar ladakh paapaani,
baar-i-khodaaya paap nevaar*

*A.K. Rahbar

[—Where wilt thou slip out, all by yourself, renouncing children and household? Who will shoulder the sins thus committed ?

Absolve me of my sins, merciful God!]

A'rnimaal, (A.D.1638–1678), the last of the above women poets was a junior contemporary of Rupa Bhavani. She belonged to Palhalan, near Pattan, and was married to Bhavani Dass Kachru when she was in her early childhood. The marriage proved disastrous and she spent her life with her parents. The pangs of her unrequited love, the intensity of her sorrow, her frustration and helplessness effloresced in spontaneous songs, beautiful, sensuous and musical. These pangs that seared her inner life gave to Kashmiri language poetic gems of the highest order:

*Sönä chham geylaan kuni chhum nä melaan,
Parzen saäte chhum kheylaana*

[—My rivals indulge in backtalk that having deserted me he makes merry with others.]
Despite that she re-affirms her deep love for her beloved husband.

*Hän han chham lolä chaani ba'rith,
Zölä chham nai söndrey, söndärey*

[—Every membrane in me is suffused with love for thee; I get not a wink of sleep, naught availeth my matchless beauty], and invites him:
I'll fancy-furnish white plastered apartments for you,
Do deign to stay in our mansion, my beloved of numerous love-names!
Sentiments of humility, resignation but unshakeable fidelity emerge from:

*Shäi yaar aäsi' tän, pooshi'tän pärdän,
Toti chham vönda' säi säth !*

[—Even though the beloved dallies with others, my hope persists and it gives some satisfaction to my heart.]

Two hundred years later, the Urdu poet ventilated the same sentiment in the verse:

*Tum jano tum ko gaer sey jo räsm ö rah ho,
Häm ko bhi poochhtey räho toä kya gunah ho.*

[—You may keep to yourself whatever dealings you have with others. Heavens will not fall if you maintain your contacts with me!]

Such was the stock of Kashmiri language, poetry and literature when Rupa Bhavani took birth in A.D. 1625.

The Age of Rupa Bhavani

Rupa Bhavani was no world leader. She was a humble person who dedicated the whole of her life to a search for the eternal depths of her being. What made her diverge from the beaten track of wedded life followed almost without exception by women all over the earth? Biographies of Rupa Bhavani written after she shuffled her mortal coil, and the living tradition among people whose families have for generations been worshipping her as a deity regard her as an incarnation of the Goddess Sharika. Even the Muslims living around the Nawa Kadal locality of Srinagar, where her ancestors grew up, as well as those in such areas as Manigam and Vaskur villages where she practised penance, felt convinced that she had inherited qualities far above the recognised traits of saintliness. It can, as such, be concluded that she was predestined for the role she played for the hundred years' sojourn on our earth. Despite that, other forces and tendencies that the seventeenth century threw up could not but have cast their influence on her in mapping out her path.

Kashmir has been known as the earthly paradise but her people stoutly contest that appellation. There have been ugly patches all along in its history. In the generation before Zain-ul-Abidin (A.D. 1420-70) ascended the throne, peace-loving people suffered

persecution because of their faith. For a hundred years after her death innumerable people died because of natural calamities, social discord, civil wars and misrule. Conditions improved to some extent when the Moghul emperor Akbar annexed the land, but not for long. Historians have recorded events for the next century that easily depress and frustrate a sensitive soul.

A few years before Rupa Bhavani took her birth the population was decimated in a severe epidemic of cholera in the regime of Ahmad Beg Khan, *subedar* (A.D. 1615–17). Dead bodies of the victims were thrown naked into the river and people abstained from taking fish for a long time. One Hassan Shawl had a large herd of cattle, but he was forced to drive them into the forest as he had no heir to look after them. The rivers were the only source from where people fetched water for drinking and other needs, and one can well imagine the horror that they felt, especially the women, when they saw dead bodies float down while they filled their pitchers.

Natural calamities in the shape of floods were frequent, especially because the Moghul *subedars*, unsure of their tenure, rarely took effective measure to control them. In a devastating flood in A.D. 1668 numerous houses floated like spinning boats down the rivers, the inmates still alive making frantic appeals for some effort to rescue them. Around A.D. 1710 the skies disgorged inordinately heavy rains resulting in excessive floods that led to the collapse of hundreds of buildings.

People are generally seasoned to face many hardships as long as they have a roof over their heads, especially in a locale where rains are not

subject to seasonal controls, as in the valley of Kashmir. But they suffer untold misery when rains, or man-made disorders, drove them into the streets almost naked. One natural calamity occurred in A.D. 1668, the year of the devastating flood referred to above, when in a prolonged earthquake buildings shook severely for one whole day. Another severe earthquake was experienced only a few years earlier, in A.D. 1682. Fortunately, no serious damage was caused. But a decimating famine overwhelmed the valley in A.D. 1647 when, leaving their hearth and home, roof and shelter, people resorted to migration *en masse*. Another large-scale famine leading to serious consequences brought suffering and distress to the land in A.D. 1685.

An extensive outbreak of fire around the Jama Masjid took place in A.D. 1617, the year of the cholera epidemic, and many buildings, massive or average, were reduced to cinders. The place is a short distance from the locality where Rupa Bhavani's father Madho Joo Dhar lived. Mouth to ear tales of this occurrence, for which one section of people blamed another, must have lived for many years after the birth of Rupa Bhavani, in 1621. Jama Masjid as well as Zadibal were renovated.

Another occurrence of fire took place in A.D. 1671 when over twelve thousand buildings, including the monumental Jama Masjid, are said to have fallen victim. The emperor, Aurangzeb, expressed his distress at the calamity. Unfortunately, people had to experience another large-scale visitation of fire in A.D. 1711 which encompassed twenty *mohallas* (localities), and reduced forty thousand structures to ashes.

In our times we see how slight variations in the tax structure ruin innumerable people when prices go haywire. In the wake of the famine and the mass migration of the 1640s, land was largely left uncultivated and the prices of foodgrains skyrocketed. In a couple of years when migrants started trekking back in hordes, rioting broke out, the target being Mahadev Pandit Peshkar, perhaps a relation of Madho Joo Dhar. His house was plundered and torched. Mulla Yusuf Kawoosa, a leading citizen, went to Delhi *via* Poonch and waited upon the emperor, Shah Jehan. The latter asked the Mulla who in his judgement was to blame for the rioting, leading to plunder and arson at Mahadev's residence.

'Kase ra qasoor neyst, lekin.... (no one is to blame, but.....).

The emperor lost his cool and thundered, "*Gunahi man ast... Raast ast ki az raahi poonch aamadi...* [—It is my fault....It fully establishes that you have come *via* Poonch.]*

By A.D. 1657, another economic crisis erupted: foodgrain prices crashed. One *khirwar* of paddy could fetch just one chicken. The distress of the mass of people can well be imagined.

A few of the *subedars* were cultured and liberal while the majority were harsh and selfish, indulging in extortion. Among the former were Zafar Khan Ahsan, Ali Mardan Khan and Ibrahim Khan who built roads, rest-houses and gardens, and looked at the problems of the people with sympathy and concern. Many others raised taxes and imposts.

* It is said that Kawoosa took to heart the drubbing he received from the emperor and expired the moment he stepped out.

Fruit-trees, gardens, private forests, etc., were so heavily taxed that people preferred to fell them down. For picking saffron flowers labourers were given no more than a little salt. A *subedar* was pleased to tax even such a pinch of salt earned as wages. Another *subedar* raised, besides *shali* (paddy), an additional tax in the shape of fuel. Villagers were subject to another imposition in the shape of livestock* for the public exchequer. A *subedar* doubled this imposition at one stroke and the incidence was raised from two to four lambs per head. Shah Jehan removed some of the harsh imposts while some more were set aside by good *subedars* like Fazil Khan (A.D. 1699–1702) who encouraged raising of new orchards, buildings and bridges. The sacred relic arrived in Kashmir in his time through Kh. Noor-ud-din Ishābāri.

Aurangzeb Aalamgir passed away in A.D. 1705 while he was in Aurangabad in the Deccan. An orthodox and disciplined Muslim, he had left instructions that his mortal remains be laid to rest in as simple a manner as possible. For three hundred years the mighty emperor slept under mother earth with no more than a plain stone over him till the-then Nizam of Hyderabad replaced it with an unostentatious marble slab.

While the law and order situation was on the whole stable for a long time, there were serious challenges off and on. Soon after the birth of Rupa Bhavani, the Chaks, a martial community, mutineed. They had created serious trouble even for Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin and ultimately two Chak leaders lifted

* Such taxes as those on crops, fuel, livestock and, later, birch bark had to be deposited in kind.

the crown from the head of the last Sultan, Habib Shah, in A.D. 1554, and placed it on the head of Ghazi Khan Chak, their kinsman. But in A.D. 1622, Shah Jehan's *subedar*, Aetiqad Khan, arrested large numbers of the Chaks, and beheading many drove the itch of power out of their hearts. They took to agriculture after this experience.

A daughter of the Maliks of Shahabad in Anantnag district was married to Prince Murad Bakhsh. The latter was appointed *subedar* of Kashmir in A.D. 1641. The prince appointed many favourites from his wife's clan on high posts and the latter exploited their powers even as ducks take to water. People were put to suffering, and their protest, was expressed in the well-known doggerel: *Kaava yenivol, Muradun mol...* (This world is short-lived even as the wedding festival of crows....). This general observation is followed by a verbal slap to the emperor Shah Jehan in the coinage '*Muradun Mol*' (Murad's papa)... and 'the petty bickerings of people dragging each other by the central tuft of hair on the head. This innuendo has since been preserved in folk literature though not many are aware of the marriage of Prince Murad to his Kashmiri *belle*. The princely *subedar* was dismissed by his royal father shortly after.

Some of the natural calamities cited above could not be foreseen while man-made miseries could be traced to a failure of human judgement and character. The impact was, by and large, local. Another event that took place in A.D. 1675 and had implications for the whole sub-continent, sprouted out of seeds sown in the valley. While Aurangzeb appears to have encouraged proselytisation, other

zealots, administration and the clergy enjoyed the spree in this behalf. They exerted pressure, among others on the Pandits of Mattan, the ancient pilgrimage centre, to seek salvation through Islam.

The latter considered the matter thoroughly and decided to approach for advice Guru Tegh Bahadur, father of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. A delegation under Pandit Kripa Ram of Mattan waited upon the Guru. He was aware of the far-reaching implications of the freedom of worship for all citizens. He advised the delegation to report to the Subedar of Kashmir that they would embrace Islam if the Guru took the lead in this behalf.

The message reached the emperor in Delhi. The Guru's name was already in his black books. Several charges were made against him which the king's Qazis confirmed. The Guru had anticipated such developments and formulated his plans to meet the situation to the best of his abilities. He was arrested, taken to Delhi and beheaded at Chandni Chowk. The panic and gloom among Kashmiri Pandits could not be anything but deep and bitter. Rupa Bhavani was fifty years old then, but she was so absorbed in her pursuit of self-realisation that not the faintest hint is traceable in her *vaakhs*.

Balji Dhar, a nephew of Rupa Bhavani, held a post in the administration in Delhi and, probably, kept his aunt informed of the fateful and gruesome events in and around the Red Fort: the march of Aurangzeb to the throne through rivers of blood, the incarceration of Shahjehan and his daughters, Aurangzeb's attitude towards non-Muslims, death of Aurangzeb in A.D. 1705, in the Deccan, death of Shah Alam in A.D. 1713, followed by murders of princes and

claimants to the throne during the next decade. Rupa Bhavani had already lived most of that period in penance and meditation. While the events were heart-searing for ordinary mortals, they must have instilled among devotees deeper faith in the might of the Supreme Lord.

But all this was nothing in comparison to the dire and doleful events that dominated the Valley while Rupa Bhavani telling her penultimate *soham* on her rosary. Under the leadership of one Mahtavi Khan, lawless and criminal elements held the land to ransom. So grave was the situation that the administration lost control for over two years. When troops made an attempt to intervene they were pelted from rooftops with stones and heavy tree-trunk pestles used for pounding paddy. All told, it was a naked dance of plunder, arson and death. It sprang from a minor difference between a Sunni Muslim and a Shia and the Hindus were also drawn into the maelstrom. When the Shias realised their inadequacy, they sought shelter in the Khana'qah of Zadibal in Srinagar, but rued their decision when the Khana'qah was torched at night and countless men, women and children are said to have been burnt to death. The Hindus also paid their price in terms of death, loot and arson, but a worse punishment was in store for them in terms of the order pronounced by Mahtavi Khan that they, the Hindus (i) shall not wear turbans on the head, (ii) shall wear grass sandals on their feet, (iii) shall not appear on horseback in the streets, nor display the *tilak* mark, (iv) shall not send their children for study in schools, and (v) shall pay the *jiziya* (poll-tax).

The disorder raged for two years till Abdul Samad

Khan Saif-ul-daula brought it to an end in A.D. 1723. Rupa Bhavani ended her sojourn on the earth in A.D. 1721.

Emperors and commoners, saints and sinners have reacted to this material world, each in his or her own way. The heir-apparent to the throne of Kapilvastu could not stand the sight of death, disease, pain or hunger. Renouncing the throne, and forsaking his young wife and child, Siddhartha slipped out into the vast and dark world, emerging finally in all serenity as the Buddha. Asoka surveyed the outcome of the massacre he had caused in Kalinga and forswore violence for ever. His message was carried all over the-then civilised world by high ranking-envoys, including his own children. Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani, alias Nund Rishi, had to face oppressive social problems and domestic pressure. When it was suggested to him that he renounce his family and practise penance far from the madding crowd, he turned down the suggestion; "Where do I go all by myself, renouncing my family? Whom shall I encumber with the burden of my sins?" Jesus Christ, Mansoor, Gandhi and others reacted to the contradictions of living according to their respective perceptions. Placed in different situations they would probably have displayed different traits of character, ideology, leadership and philosophy of life. The same applies to Rupa Bhavani, her growth, philosophy of life and attainments. We pay our homage to outstanding individual talent, as T.S. Eliot put it, but tradition and environment inevitably exact our tribute.

A Short Life-Sketch

Meru Pandit Dhar, whose ancestors migrated from Kashmir in a mass exodus during a period of intolerance and bigotry, returned to the ancestral land as an officer in the army of Jehangir (A.D. 1605–21). His family settled in the Nawa Kadal-Safa Kadal locality. In this family was born Madho Joo Dhar, the great grandson of Meru Pandit. Madho Joo was a devotee of the Divine Mother and made obeisance at her shrine at Sharika Parbat (now *Hari parbat*) early in the morning. While maintaining close contacts with the seekers of Truth like Rahbaab Saheb (Muslim) and Rishi Pir (Hindu), he drew his inspiration and strength from his daily meditation at the hill of *Sharika* which was not far from his residence.

One morning Madho Joo reached Hari Parbat much too early than was his wont. It was the first of Nauratra in the month of Ashvin (October) in A.D. 1620.* Though there was no one about, he sat in his usual lotus pose and became absorbed in meditation. He had a unique experience: the spot was lit up with effulgence and a pretty little girl emerged from it. Madho Joo was taken by surprise. His throat got choked and teardrops rolled down his eyes. Having

* The exact date of birth of Madho Joo is not confirmed which may cause some doubt about the chronology of events till the birth of Rupa Bhavani.

realised that the little girl could be none other than his *Ishta* (the heart-cherished Deity), Sharika Devi, he was his own self instantly. As the little girl sat on his knee he worshipped her with flowers and put into her mouth fruit which he used as an offering every morning, as is the usual practice. The divine form desired him to ask for a boon. "Would that you came to us in this very form," was his reply. "Let it be so!" was the reply and the little girl was out of sight immediately.

A female baby took birth in the house of Madho Joo on the *Jethpoornamashi* day in A.D. 1621, in confirmation of the boon granted to him. They named the infant Rupa (Roph in Kashmiri), the enchanting beauty of the divinity. She was known by the name Rupa Bhavani all her life, though during the last few decades of her sojourn on earth people referred to her as Rophded (Granny Rupa) and Alakhéshvari. Her stellar chart made it doubtful if she could enjoy a felicitous family life, the ambition of all parents for their children, especially girls. Had she chosen the hour of her birth purposefully?

During the years of her early childhood she was witness to many a discussion or exposition that her father had with saints and mystics off and on. She could not escape the influence and would be found occasionally repeating *Om Namah Shivay*. She also made her obeisance at the Hari Parbat along with her father. While she was very young, the sparks of a lofty spiritual career were already apparent to a few mystics.

Rupa was married at a very young age to Hiranand Sapru, of Habba Kadal. Before long, however, her family life turned sour. While the Indian mother has attained celebrity for her love and self-sacrifice, the mother-in-law's score, as evident

from the sufferings of *Lalded, Haba Khatoon, Mira Bai, and later of Rupa Bhavani, projects in an unfavourable light.

Her mother-in-law appears to have had a motiveless aversion towards Rupa. She looked at her with suspicion and infected her son with the same. Hiranand appears to have been a unique young man without any affection or tenderness towards his wife. Probably, he shared his mother's suspicion that Rupa was a witch who disappeared at midnight. Many a devotee avowed that they had seen her on the back of a leopard proceeding towards Sharika Parbat. One night when he went to verify this phenomenon, she signalled him to follow her. He felt bewildered and returned home crushed with frustration. On her return Rupa urged him not to disclose to his mother what he had observed on his way to Hari Parbat. But he prattled to his mother without any compunction. Realising that her identity had been betrayed finally, Rupa Bhavani bade adieu to her life as a householder and plunged into the uncharted ocean of life.

Another incident pertaining to the said period indicates that a female inmate of the Dhar family saw at midnight a dazzling light where Rupa Bhavani

* Lalded, a mystic and poetess flourished in Kashmir in the fourteenth century. Her experience is sketched in the verse:

Hönd maäri'tan yaa käṭhai Lāli nalavaṭh tsäli nä zaānh
[—The in-laws may serve meat in plenty to guests, but Lalla's rice-plate would always appear blown up because of a stone covered with a thin layer of rice.]

Haba Khatoon, a Kashmiri poetess of the sixteenth century records:

Häshi laäynam täpisai thäph, Ti mey' gomo motä khota säkh

[—While plying *charkha* late at night she felt spent out, but her mother-in-law jerked her by the hair.]

used to meditate upon the Supreme Spirit. She screamed and the knowledge of this effulgence through Rupa's *sahasraar* (the thousand-petalled lotus just under the skull) leaked out. Rupa's determination to meditate in seclusion was reinforced.

Among the many miracles attributed to Rupa Bhavani, two pertain to the period she lived with her husband. A young *purohit* who was put to shame by her father-in-law for his 'ignorance' crossed her path as she came with a pitcher of water from the river. Having a clear perception of his discomfiture, even though she was away from the scene, she urged him to return to the house and face the critics again with full confidence. He felt motivated to accept her advice and confronted his critics with arguments in an oration in such high-flaunting Sanskrit that they wondered how he had been able to turn the tables on his fault-finders in a short time.

It is customary among Kashmiri Pandits to send to the in-laws of a daughter presents of sanctified offerings to the Deity and cooked dishes on specific occasions. Once Rupa's parents sent a pot full of *kheer* (porridge cooked in milk) by way of a present. Her mother-in-law expressed disdain at the 'petty' quantity of sanctified *kheer*. Rupa very humbly and courteously assured her that the quantity was more than enough for distribution among the kith and kin of the Sapru clan. "Please ladle out liberally without taking off the lid or peering inside," she added. The mother-in-law did not catch the hint, and started sampling out the *kheer* with vengeance in the expectation that the bottom of the container would be visible in a few moments, enabling her to taunt Rupa. The process went on for a pretty long time, but the

supply of porridge could not be exhausted. The mother-in-law was so obtuse that despite that experience she continued to berate Rupa in every way and directed her to have the container returned to her parents. All that Rupa Bhavani did was to let the container float from Haba Kadal down to Dedamar where Madho Joo Dhar picked it up at the conclusion of his evening *sandhya*.

Relations between Rupa Bhavani and her in-laws having continued tense because of the latter's aversion, lack of understanding and disaffection, the young bride could stand it no longer, and decided to turn her back on the world, forsaking her husband, her in-laws and even her parents. She took up her residence on the outskirts of Srinagar. She let loose her locks of hair and lived for decades in caves, forests and silvan surroundings, remaining unseen or invisible. On this account she was known as Alakheshwari*.

All types of men and women, saints and sinners, have lived on this earth. Some of them have been epitomes of godliness while others have helped artists and writers in the portrayal of hell. They are, however, born the same way and make their exit from this world the same way. Saints and prophets, though conscious of their mission, did not choose to remain immune from the cup of misery that falls to the lot of the common mortal. Rupa Bhavani trod the same thorny path of hardship, penance, hunger, backtalk of traducers, but did not let the dangers and difficulties sway her from her determination. She engaged herself in a strenuous search for the truth in a life of austerity, penance and meditation.

* The word *alak* indicates 'hair' as well as the state of invisibility

Spending twelve and a-half years at the first resort outside home was real hard discipline. People who heard about her thronged to wait upon her to seek some guidance. Not convinced that she was mature enough for such a role, she shifted to Manigam, near Kangan, in the Sindh valley. Some scholars refer to Manigam, formerly Mayagram, as the birth-place of the celebrated Kalidas, on the basis of its profuse beauty of nature closely reflected in the poet's unmatched verses. When Emperor Akbar caught a glimpse of its enchantment in A.D. 1597, he stayed there for two days, something very exceptional. As the breeze careers through the pines one can realise the significance of the sound *hrim*. Rupa Bhavani got a humble shelter fixed and devoted herself to meditation. No one knew about her presence there for quite some time.

Circumstances unknown to her lifted the veil on her incognito stay in the forest. A milkman owning a good number of cows usually grazed them near the forest shelter where Rupa Bhavani stayed. One day he noticed one of the cows straying away from the herd at midday and slipping into a dense cluster of lofty *deodars*. Thereafter, a female recluse with her hair hanging loose on her ochre-coloured garment emerged from a makeshift shelter, fondled the cow and placed a pot under her teats. Milk dripped into the pot till it was full. The *sadhvi* kissed the cow and watched it join the herd.

The observation intrigued the milkman. That the woman stayed all alone in the dense forest where wild animals roamed told him a lot about her character, personality and strength. Around dusk when he milked the above-mentioned cow along with

others, he was further surprised that the quantity was more instead of the usual, despite what the *sadhvi* secured. For some time the milkman kept quiet over the incident, but when it was repeated everyday; and unable to hold the secret any longer, he took into his confidence one Lal Chand, *nambardar* of the village. Being well-grounded in the ancient Indian tradition of rendering hospitality to all strangers, Lal Chand made obeisance to her and begged of her to shift from the wild forest to his house. Rupa Bhavani was fully at home in the lap of nature and did not heed the invitation of Lal Chand. When day after day Lal Chand repeated his request in all earnestness and sincerity, Bhavani finally agreed to shift to his house but insisted she would not stay a minute longer when she felt she had overstayed.

The arrival of Rupa Bhavani in his house gave Lal Chand prosperity and prominence in and around his village. Many people came to his house to sit at her feet, but she did not relish it as it interfered with her meditation. During this period a severe famine* visited the land and stocks in Lal Chand's house also dwindled when he offered grains to the needy. Fearing that the hungry and the poor would be oppressed, Rupa Bhavani asked him to bring to her presence the ricebin that still remained and distribute its contents without reservation to whoever asked for it. She, however, forbade him to displace the lid or to cast a glance inside the bin. Under her benediction the contents of the bin multiplied unseen and the village-folk stocked their homes with

* Famines have caused havoc in Kashmir in 1647 and 1685 A.D.

foodgrains to last a long time. It appeared to Lal Chand as though Bhavani was enacting the role of Annapurna inside.

This incident provoked more and more people to seek her *darshans* for blessings. She felt the need of going into seclusion for undisturbed meditation, but Lal Chand would not hear of it. She is said to have created an illusion of a mighty conflagration engulfing many houses including that of Lal Chand, so much so that the latter shouted to her to rush out of the house to save her life and his honour and, in fact, rushed out of the house with Bhavani on his shoulders. Once they were out, the illusion disappeared and everything was as it had been before. Lal Chand took the hint and agreed to her going into seclusion once again.

Her next place of stay was Lar (Laar) near the bank of the Shakhöl, a canal that takes off from the Sindh river. She planted a half-burnt branch of a *chinar* near her shanty and it grew into a majestic tree in course of time. Here she was wholly engaged in meditation and penance. Occasionally she was seen floating down the river seated on a mat*. This came to the notice of a Muslim saint Shah Qalandar who commanded wide respect. One day while the Shah Saheb was seated near the river bank, Rupa Bhavani floated down. The following conversation is said to have taken place:

Shah Qalandar: What is your name?

Rupa Bhavani: Röph (which stands for Rupa as well as silver)

* The mat could be a fabrication of tree branches with a covering of grass. She was not in the habit of exhibiting her occult powers unnecessarily, and never out of vanity.

S.Q. : If you cross over to this side, you will turn into gold. (He was playing with the words silver and gold).

This conversation has been interpreted to mean that despite her meditation she was of no better value than silver but that she could rise to golden heights if she chose to embrace Islam.

But Rupa Bhavani retorted:

"If you cross to this side you will become a pearl (*mokhtā* in Kashmiri)", hinting that he would attain the absolute in following her path. She, it is believed, meant to convey that being bothered by caste, creed and nomenclature, he was far, far from the goal.

On another occasion when he talked to her about the ochre colour of her garments she conveyed to him in chosen words that superficialities lead one nowhere and that he should focus all his attention on the reality within.*

During her stay at Shakhöl-Lar she attracted the attention of many seekers of truth. She found it advisable, therefore, to shift her *ashram* to Vasäkur, a village named after Nag Vasuki. Ali Mardan Khan, a reputed Moghul *subedar* is said to have sought her blessings at Vasäkur. While she was there she chose to restore the sight to the blind eyes of a Muslim boy. The decent, well-to-do family of Maliks to whom the boy belonged were sore at heart because of the incapacity of his eyes. One day she was sitting in the shade of a *chinar* tree. Quite a number of people sat

* They never met again but Shah Qalander paid a tribute to her in Persian verse when she passed away. "That seeker of truth and beloved of God named Alak left this world and her spirit took flight towards Heaven to merge with the unique and non-dual Reality".

around to listen to the precious words she uttered while busy in bridging the earth and heaven. The blind boy was utterly unaware of who was around but by chance came close to her. She grasped his hand, placed in it a twig and asked him to dig the earth nearby to make a small ditch. The boy got nervous but followed the instructions. In a short while, water made its appearance at the spot and she asked him to sprinkle his eyes with the same water. When the child did so, his eyes were enlivened with sight. Everyone was wonderstruck and the Malik family experienced unbounded delight. With their efforts this little ditch was turned into a well, and water is drawn from it for use at the anniversary of her six-monthly *shradha* .

Another incident of the period also reveals the extent of her latent power or *shakti*. Rupa Bhavani's brother Lalā Joo and his son Balji had dedicated themselves to her service. The latter accordingly remained virtually illiterate. Through their intelligence and valour the Dhars of Srinagar have held high administrative posts under the Mughals, the Pathans, the Sikhs, the Dogras and the British within Kashmir and outside in Panjab, Delhi, Kabul and many Indian states. That Balji remained good for nothing because of his illiteracy could not but trouble his father. One day when he revealed his distress to his sister Rupa Bhavani, she decided to retrieve the situation. Casting a meaningful glance at Balji, she called for some writing material. A twig from a pomegranate tree was placed in the hands of the illiterate youth and she asked him to write an application to the emperor in Delhi for a suitable placement. "Let us wait for his response", she added.

Balji drafted the application as though he were a veteran in the art of drafting and everybody around was taken by surprise. Balji is said to have secured a decent placement in Delhi. What is surprising, he corresponded with his aunt in accomplished Persian verse.

Having spent another twelve and a-half years at Vasākur, Rupa Bhavani, at the importunities of her devotees, returned to Srinagar and settled down in the Nawa Kadal-Safa Kadal locality for which Baba Israr Rajpuri coined the name "Gulzari Alakh". After attaining the life-long objectives of her penance and meditation in pursuit of the Supreme Light, her presence gave a fillip to social amelioration. She succeeded in creating effective public opinion against bigamy among Kashmiri Pandits, as also to end animal sacrifice at their shrines. Her efforts for harmony among Hindus and Muslims can be appreciated in the light of her lofty standing among Muslim *sufis* and *fakirs*. That, after she shuffled her mortal coil, the Muslims wanted to give a befitting burial to her earthly remains indicates how closely they appreciated her teachings. Her influence is also to be judged by the fact that the Hindu-Muslim harmony was revived without loss of time after the devastating fall-out of the disturbances led by Mahatvi Khan and his cohorts.

Having been born on the fifteenth of the bright fortnight of Jeth, A.D. 1621,* she chose to leave for her eternal abode on the seventh of the dark fortnight of Magh, corresponding to 25 January, 1721. Though she

* There is some controversy on the year of her birth. Some hold that she was born in A.D. 1625.

struggled all her life for attaining eternal peace, her departure caused some unrest in the locality where she left her mortal remains. Having been accessible to Hindus and Muslims alike, both claimed the title to perform her last rites. Events thereafter are reported in different versions: what has gained currency is that the Muslims being larger in number succeeded in getting the corpse enclosed in a coffin. They were then proceeding to the burial-ground when the lid opened, and Rupa Bhavani draped in a shroud emerged in great frenzy from the coffin, returned to her *ashram*, closed the doors and lay down. The Muslims were thus convinced that she was alive and they retired to their respective homes. The month being January, the weather thereafter turned extremely foul. It snowed heavily and darkness engulfed every object. Her family who saw her enshrouded body lying on the floor, quietly made all the arrangements for her cremation and carried her on a bier for her last journey. En route they met the *nambardar* of Vasākur named Nanda Ram who ridiculed their attempt to cremate her, saying he had left her alive at her *ashram* at Vasākur and she had conveyed her desire to stay there permanently. He added that she had sent him to Srinagar to collect dried grapes, raisins, coconuts and candysticks. Those who carried the bier on their shoulders felt their burden lightened. They lifted the covering and felt bewildered that there was nothing inside except a few flowers and a few strands of hair.

They showered the flowers on the waves of the Jhelum and preserved the hair at the *ashram* where she had breathed her last. The holy relics are maintained to this day and the *ashram* has grown

into a place of meditation and worship. Her devotees throng there on the return of her annual and six-monthly *shradhas*, and participate in a largely-attended *havan*, carrying the *prasadam* to their friends, kith and kin. The fraternity of her devotees gets extended generation after generation through inheritance, matrimonial alliances and self-imposed vows. All such families zealously participate in the festival, cook *kheer* and distribute it among friends, relations and well-wishers. Many seek boons from the departed saint and mark its fulfilment with a fast and participation in the festival at the shrine.

Bhavani as a Yogini

*Sharan aayas Laleshwaras,
Shri satgōras Madh'va Shivas*

[—I made obeisance to Lalleshwari and Shiva-like *satguru* Madhava Dhar.]

Rupa Bhavani has attained a significant place in the history of Kashmiri poetry, but her whole life was dedicated to the search for Yoga. She is a *yogini* first and a poetess later. This role is not peculiar to her. As already hinted earlier, eminent literary figures who blazed a trail in the valley either through Sanskrit, or Persian or Kashmiri, drew their inspiration through philosophy, religion, mysticism or Sufism. They resorted to the medium of poetry to give utterance to their inner meaningful experiences. Without going back to the Sanskritists, we notice the first main exponent of Kashmiri poetry, Lal Ded, who was initiated in *yoga* by Siddha Srikanth and effloresced as a poetess of the highest order. Sheikh-ul'Alam Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani (A.D. 1378-1438), her younger contemporary, dedicated his whole life to piety, search for the eternal truth, righteousness, love of goodness, and decried pretence, selfishness and hypocrisy. His *shrukhs* (*shlokas*) amply reflect these traits of his personality. Both could be called 'people's poets' in the best sense of the expression, since throughout the last five hundred

years their sparkling imagery, similes, metaphors, contrasts and glimpses of inner experience surface from the mental recesses of the elite and the illiterate alike.

Following their first steps a whole host of saints, sufis and *rishis*, from Habibullah Newshehri of the sixteenth century down to Paramanand, Shamas Faqir, Nyama' Saeb, Krishna Razdan, Asad Mir, Zinda Kaul and Ahad Zargar give tongue to and reiterate their inner experiences. The cumulative impact of these personalities justify the appellation '*reshvaer*' (the garden where *rishis* spring up from the soil) given to the Valley of Kashmir. In her struggle for sighting the light of the self, Rupa Bhavani has left behind indelible footprints on the psyche of the common people.

The purpose of *yoga*, according to authorities, is to help men and women to attain their fullest development at levels of consciousness—somatic, psycho-somatic and mental. It holds the key to better living—physical, social, moral and spiritual, leading to greater efficiency in various activities, and happier lives. There is nothing 'Hindu' about *yoga*. It is being practised selectively in all countries and has attracted devotees from all faiths: Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and the followers of Zoroaster, though they may have understood it through a different nomenclature. Swami Ramakrishna temporarily suspended his own peculiar *sadhana*, but attained the same goals through the paths followed by the Muslims and the Christians. Many Kashmiri Muslim poets also appear to have been familiar with *pranayama* and other techniques in the practice of *yoga*. Their verse

compositions on this and similar themes are fairly received by the public and are often referred to as *shaster*: 'Soham sū facilitates the concentration of my mind', (Shah Gafoor); 'I sought Him up hill and down dale till I recalled that He bears the same name as mine,' (Nyamā Saeb); 'No light is possible wherever duality looms large,' (Shamas Faqir); 'I'll wash my mind clean with the drippings from the *shāshikāla*', (Ra'him Saāb).

The practice of *yoga* is guided by a technology that remains unchanged even though its metaphysical ideology may be expressed differently. It is commonly regarded as an eight-fold path leading ultimately to self-realisation. It inculcates qualitative knowledge spread over eight steps or stages in its training. These steps include preliminaries like *yama* (natural self-restraint against violence), *pranayama* (control of breath or bio-energy), *dharana* (meditation), etc., till the aspirant reaches the stage of *samadhi* (stillness of mind). By persistent and sincere effort the aspirant disciplines the body and the mind so as to stand the physical, moral and psychic tensions involved in the continuous process. It is not possible for the average mortal to skip any of the stages which are designed to help him overcome all negative tendencies, including selfishness, greed, lust and vanity. Some of the practices involved in the above-noted exercise appear to be simple, yet adapting the body and mind to the spiritual perspective inherent in one's approach to *yoga* needs patience and discipline to bring the body-mind complex under one's control. In the words of Nergis Dalal, "Meditation cannot be practised in isolation. No one can sit with folded legs and think he can withdraw his mind into *samadhi*

without the preliminary practices of... *yama, niyama, asana, aranyama, dharana, dhyana* and *samadhi*".*

Pratyahara, the stage following the control of breath/bio-energy concerns itself with the withdrawal of senses inwards from their sense-objects through introspection. The aspirant proceeds gradually till he is near the awnings of *samadhi*. Nergis Dalal, quoting Patanjali, observes, "Stillness of mind is *yoga*, but this stillness does not come easily. To watch the thoughts as they arise and then catch the space between two thoughts, and to prolong that space between the restrained thought and the rising thought, that is *ekagrata-parinama*. The *yogi's* mind travels from restraint to tranquility, and from there to a single point of awareness, where the mind, body and energy are completely focussed on towards the core of the self." This is the awareness of the sage abiding in itself.

Everyone who chooses to tread the path of *yoga* may not have to inch his way up, for some start from a vantage point where they stopped in their previous life and have a shorter and easier way to go. This is evident from the lines of saints and *avatars* who, owing to their noble *karmas*, have had a higher start. Rupa Bhavani was also conscious of being the incarnation of the goddess Sharika. Some scholars believe that Bhavani has consciously portrayed her *avatarhood* in the ten *shlokas* of *Svanubhavaol lasa Dashakam* in *Rahasya Upadesha* and even in the *Jnan Khand: Mataraupi su mödur daam piyov....*[st. 73]

"The Divine Creatrix endowed me at my birth

*The Hindustan Times. May 4, 1998.

with a drip of nectar.... I was inspired to continue my progress on my appointed path."

India is a land of *karma* or rebirth, i.e., a person continues taking birth after birth and, actually, never dies permanently. Those who do good deeds expect to live a better life in their next existence, while others go down the ladder into inferior status, morally and otherwise, till by their deeds they make up for their deviation from the correct path. There are many anecdotes about people who were born amidst inferior circumstances, but enjoyed eminence intellectually and spiritually. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan believed that being the highest creation of nature, a human being could not take an inferior birth among animals, reptiles and the like.

Most people, however, hold the view that man is a noble creature but his nobility gets coated over with dross in the form of evil tendencies, greed, lust, illusion and other offshoots of the ego. Many among us spend their lives in trying to fulfil such venal desires while a few overcome them with introspection, good deeds and suppression of the ego. The latter are convinced that with proper discipline, meditation and appropriate technique it is possible for every soul to realise its identity with the Absolute. The goal is there while the approaches differ from the benevolent attitude of the compassionate householder to the God-intoxication of the mystic who sees the Absolute everywhere and in everything. Absolute love, *namasumran* (repetition of the Lord's name), *yoga* (including *karma yoga*, *Bhakti yoga*, *Jnan yoga*, *Rajayoga*....) are some of the other paths for realising the Supreme Spirit. Even those whom genteel society rejects, like cobblers, butchers, have been found to have traversed far on the path of self-realisation.

The initial stages of discipline through which the practice of *yoga* lends an aspirant help in cleaning the mind and the heart, improving the harmony between our aspirations, desires and deeds, facilitates our progress towards *dharna* and *dhyana*. They also have a soothing effect on our nerves, including those of the spinal column responsible for the control of bionary forces. *Yogis* believe that immense potential energy is stored at the end of the spinal chord in a serpentine shape of two and a half coils. This energy called *kundalini shakti*, can be awakened through proper technique till it reaches the cranium. It passes through six halting stops identified as *chakras* or lotuses with four petals at *muladhara*, the lowest, six at the next named *svadhishtana*, ten at *manipura*, or the navel, twelve at *anahata* (the heart region), sixteen at *Vishudha* (throat) and two at *Ajnya* (between the eyebrows). This energy, when fully developed and controlled can reach the *brahmarandra/ sahasrara*, a thousand-petalled lotus inside the top of the head. Those who can activate this energy and can control it, find their lives transformed, attain *siddhis* (psychic powers) and find their onward journey towards self-realisation easy and smooth. It would be reasonable to believe that apart from what has been indicated above there may be other techniques for awakening the energy and operating it. The activation of *kundalini shakti*, however, is incidental and is not synonymous with self-realisation where the individual soul gets absorbed in the universal soul, all differences having vanished.

Experts in cybernetics believe that the human brain comprises innumerable cells packed with

immense energy. In a fully grown-up person only a limited number of such cells are activated. The number of activated cells is larger in an intelligent person while a genius is much ahead of the latter in having activated brain cells. It is believed that through the practice of *yoga* and other techniques any number of silent or inert cells can be activated by a select few from time to time, with the result that they could make a display of extraordinary psychic powers: ESP, clairvoyance, healing, etc. Many such have been hailed as saints, mystics and prophets. Swami Yogananda has recorded a unique experience of meeting and talking to a woman in Bengal who did not need to eat for survival as she could absorb energy direct from the sun.*

Rupa Bhavani did not record her inner experience step by step, of her unity with the Absolute. *Yogis* do not do so, for the search for inner unity is an adventure into the unknown, and there are neither set rules nor infallible formulae for guidance through the uncharted void. The aspirant takes a plunge and is set on the right track if he is alert and steady. The search for unity is not acquired by attending a course of lectures in a classroom, nor by conducting experiments in a pre-conceived pattern. The *yogi* has to chart his own course, conduct experiments unknown to others and strive persistently till something clicks inside him and he catches a glimpse of the light. This sense of 'hush', 'hush' in a sense prevails in the empirical science also. How many people had watched apples fall from trees? It was only Newton's mature mind that built the theory of

* The Autobiography of a Yogi: Swami Yogananda

gravitation on this simple fact.

The most important verse in the *Bhagvad Gita*, according to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is :

*aham aatma gudakesha, sarva bhuteshu
tishthitah aham aadhyā ch madhyā chā
bhutaam ant eva chā*

(Srimad Bhagavat Gita, Ch. X,5)*

He said that all the treasures of our philosophy are held in that verse. For a saint of his eminence who experienced death in a living body, the whole treasure is neatly displayed in a few words. The treasure can, however, not be lifted away, nor stolen. It can be owned by a few only after Herculean efforts. Once the significance of these few words is understood and realised the entire battle is won. But realising the truth veiled in these words is as baffling as forcing a camel through the eye of a needle, or, in the words of Rupa Bhavani, holding an elephant by a single strand of hair.

In view of the hair-raising delicacy of the task *yogis* have devised systems of their discipline. The aspirant is expected to attain a target set for him. He is free to do what is appropriate for the purpose. He cannot, however, steal a march, nor force his way, for, as in oriental tales of yore, the path is guarded by dragons and horned beasts, or by serpents as in 'ladders and snakes'. The master knows the capacity of the aspirant and has to caution him from time to time; otherwise, if left alone the latter could land

* "I am the soul, prince victorious, which dwells in the hearts of all things. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all that lives."

himself into disaster and along with himself the mentor who initiated him in the discipline. Several instances have surfaced of initiates landing themselves in trouble because of immaturity, incapacity to control psychic powers (*siddhis*) or ignorance in how to meet unforeseen emergencies in operating the generator within the mortal frame. A teenaged aspirant continued to progress smoothly under the influence of his *guru* and developed certain powers. His *guru* used to tell him, in symbolic language, of course, that such a practice invests the practitioner with the capacity to save himself even if he jumped out of the window to certain death. The boy was tempted to test this capacity within an hour of the departure of his *guru* for a different station. The latter had gone only a few kilometres when he got a signal of the impending disaster. He pre-empted the disaster with great difficulty, but cancelled his journey and returned to his *ashram* where the boy lay repentant and despondent. The boy was subjected to greater disciplinary restraint and lost several years in the process.

Another instance is of a young man in his early twenties who, reportedly, had acquired certain powers. While walking together with two of his friends he was once challenged to give a demonstration of his powers there and then, and an innocent girl was singled out as the object. Their intention was to enjoy the embarrassment of the girl when the lower garment would slip down her legs on the roadside through the machinations, to her unknown, of the nympholept. The situation did not go out of hand and the innocent girl was somehow spared any serious embarrassment. But the matter

did not end there. The half-baked 'yogi' suffered the inevitable reaction of nature and died within a few months.

The next case concerns a respectable, serene and well-read practitioner of *yoga*. After many years of *sadhana* his face brightened up, radiating joy and good cheer. Before long, however, it appeared that all was not going well with him. His mind distracted and he turned very miserable. What actually happened is not known, but he confessed later in his memoirs that he had neglected providing his body with proper nourishment against the exertion involved in his practice. It took him several years to make up for the loss suffered. This is confirmed by another practitioner of *yoga* who kept by his side at night a bowl of rice and *kanji* (gruel) to help himself whenever he felt the need for it.

Rupa Bhavani composed about 150 *vaakhs*, or stanzas in Kashmiri through which we catch a few glimpses of her life and career. The *vaakhs* are not arranged in any systematic order either chronologically or on the basis of a yardstick measuring the progress in her inner experiences. Such an expectation is, in fact, misplaced. Those who live in the inner world do not wear their heart on the sleeve. There is no deliberate attempt on the part of a *yogi* to hide the light under a bushel. John Ruskin has elaborated that if a reader wants to discover the jewel hidden within an author's writing, he should be fully prepared to pulverise the rock within which the jewel is encased. The effort needed to reach the jewel of Eternal Truth known to Masters who span the empirical world along with the world of inner experience is immeasurably greater.

The *yogi* is at his fullest own while abiding in his self, free of all worldly attachments. Naturally, giving tongue to his thoughts and feelings is alien to the spirit of serenity and harmony that is his nature. Those who have gained access to esoteric lore will, of course, not crow about it. Some of those who have not completed the churning process of the milk of knowledge into the butter of abiding wisdom may even be apprehensive that 'crowing' can grow counter-productive. The prevailing millieu, consequently, is of silence, non-utterance and continued churning process. Kashmiri mystics have chiselled a maxim: "*tshopä chhai röpäsänz piliyai tö sönäsänz* (silence is argentine, you can even upgrade it to gold).

It has to be emphasised that despite this predominant pall of silence, *vaakh* or sound energy cannot be muzzled and it bubbles out occasionally in the form of *vaikhuri*. When this utterance materialises in normal sound, its form is not of normal speech, but of aphorisms: terse expressions compact with sense, as a *bindu* (dot) is compact space, with symbolism or otherwise.

Patanjali, the progenitor of *yoga sutras*, cast them into aphorisms which, as a terse form of expression, attracted others, including the *rishis* of the *Upanishads*. In Kashmir, the form was patronised by Acharya Vasugupta, Utpaldev and others in Sanskrit. The *vaakhs* of Rupa Bhavani could not be labelled as aphorisms but the terse expressions with turns and twists give them an identity not far different. Many others proclaim their native simplicity and feather-like touch.

Glancing through Bhavani's *vaakhs* we find them

under four sub-headings:

- (a) *Jnan Khand* or *Vakya Manjari*—114 *vakhs* or *shlokas*
- (b) *Svanobhavaollasa Dasha'kam* — ten *shlokas* on Self-realisation (*shakti svarupam param brahma soham....anand rupam param brahma soham*)
- (c) Twelve *shlokas* of *Rupa Bhavani Rahasya-Upadesh*
- (d) Ten *shlokas* of *Nirvana dash shloki tattva*

A detailed account of the nuances of the philosophy of *yoga* or its teachings does not fall within the scope of this monograph. Nevertheless, a bird's-eye view of the same cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, especially where *Rupa Bhavani's* philosophy and poetry are bound together in an action-reaction relation. Meditation involves introspection and the conversion of the vital potential energy into psychic power. The stress thus exerted on the thought-utterance system plus thought and *vakh* system, results in expression or utterance.

The motor psychic-esoteric experiences that compelled ordinary human beings to effloresce into poetical expression are varied. The experience of Valmiki is highlighted in the *Ramayana* (Balkand II,14-15). A hunter shot a male *krauncha* bird (a crane) while it was twittering with joy along with its mate on the branch of a tree. While it was weltering on the ground in its own blood, the female bird shrieked in horror and agony. Its grief deeply touched Valmiki and he let his pathos find release in the shape of verse: '*Maa nishaad....*' He was himself pleasantly surprised at his ability to create poetry

involuntarily. In the words of Dr. A. Sankaran,* “The instinct of pathos was stirred to climax. He *lost his personality* and a sense of joy resulted. This feeling of pathos translated itself spontaneously into the form of the above *sloka*. This is to be measured with the Eliotian axiom that ‘poetry is an escape from emotion’, ‘not an expression of personality but an escape from personality.’ Poetry that evokes in the critic such a sense of understanding and the sense of bliss is valued the highest.”

The laser-sharp feeling had disrupted the rust over his sensibility and he joined the ranks of the world's immortal poets. Lal Ded explained it in the words :

Keyntsai dyuthai torai aalav.....

(a few have received the call from beyond...)

Extreme love for his wife, it is believed, sublimated in Tulasidas into super hero-worship of Ramachandra; the incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Ganapati Maharaj was a saint and scholar respected for his learning, and held in high esteem by Maharshi Raman. One day he received an invitation to participate in a seminar but he declined it as his participation needed him to compose over three hundred Sanskrit verses. The maximum of one single day at his disposal was too short for the purpose. He conveyed it to the Maharshi, but the latter did not relish it, and conveyed the same to the Yogi Ganapati, adding that he would call on him the same evening. Gauging the intentions of the Maharshi, the yogi sat down that evening with pen and paper before his mentor while the other merely looked on. The

* Dr.A.Sankaran: *Some Aspects of Literary Criticism in Sanskrit*—Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, 1973.

Yogi composed all the verses well before the night was up, and presented the same at the seminar where his achievement was highly applauded.*

Faqir Abdul Karim was illiterate but was fondly devoted to his mentor, a sufi poet who recited his compositions at weekly gatherings. The Faqir was much impressed and nursed a secret longing for composing poetry but did not utter a word owing to his illiteracy. Some time later, the mentor drew applause, as usual, for his latest poetic effort, but declared that he would call it a day and compose poetry no more. The gathering was surprised but dared not question the mentor in this behalf. After a few moments he called for his *chilam* with a fresh helping of tobacco. Drawing a few puffs he handed it over to Abdul Karim who did justice to it. The mentor kept his self-imposed vow, but Abdul Karim burst into song, authoring several collections of poems, *ghazals*, etc.**

The instance of Eclava drawing inspiration from an idol of Dronacharya appears to fall in the same category.

There could, probably, be many such instances of a mentor stirring the creative faculty, *kala*, of a person he pleases. The creative process has been studied and explained from numerous angles: extensive study, acquired learning, environment, heredity, influence of friends, teachers, associates, inspiration, etc. How it is received as a gift from one to another, may be an associate, calls for a close look and explanation.

* *Day by day with Bhagawan.*

** From the preface to one of the latter's collective poems.

In an attempt to assess the grasp of Rupa Bhavani over the philosophy and practice of the eight-fold path of *yoga*, it is relevant to quote a few stanzas from the *Jnan Khand*. It is, however, to be borne in mind that the written versions of her *vakhs*, when compared one with another, reveal considerable variations. *Vakya* No.77 reads as:

Paan ye'mi' zone suh be'yis sänvarey
Nishi kaat has taarey tsandan böi

in one version. In another the second line starts with *Lashi kaathas*.....

The first:

'He who realises his inner truth can bring about upliftment in others as dry twigs acquire fragrance by the side of a piece of sandalwood.'

Substituting '*lashi*' for *nishi* turns the sentence thus:

'..... in others as a piece of resinous pine acquires fragrance by the side of a piece of sandalwood.'*

The contrast in the second version is more marked and sharp.

In *Svanubhavävollasa Dashäkam*, the second verse in stanza 5 reads:

'Guru nä chella manträ na geyla
Suh yus akeyla param braham so aham'

In another version the first line quoted above reads:

Guru nä chela, mantrö na lila....

Both depict medial rhyme. While *lila* in the second version hints the well-known assumption of

* On burning, resinous pine wood emits a flame accompanied with clouds of obnoxious soot.

divine play, *geyla* in the first is interpreted as a casual, non-serious attempt for some solemn purpose and directly against the spirit of a *mantrā*.

Such variations are by no means few and call for a serious effort to compile a standard and reliable text.

Yoga literally means 'joining together' and the chief aim of *yoga* philosophy, as propounded by Patanjali, is to expound the means by which the human soul may be completely united with the Supreme Spirit. While Rupa Bhavani has been secretive, as expected, the throb of the inner spirit was left to express itself occasionally which gives the reader a peep inside her. Though the serial order of her *vakyas* (or *vakhs*) cannot be ascertained chronologically, yet it is often possible to spot stanzas composed during the various phases of her growth, the early years, the middle phase and the concluding era.

For instance, stanza 17 indicates some ups and downs in her progress in self-realisation, but she was able to retrieve the lost ground, and the confidence that she was above the cycle of birth and death. The next stanza indicates that she received from beyond the call of her inborn spiritual legacy,

"I never depended upon water dropped by passing showers, but worked patiently with confidence for merger with the eternal spirit...."

In the next stanza, i.e., No 19, she recognises the inner radiance, *prabha*, within her. By the next stanza (No.20) she appears to have attained sufficient maturity and confidence to pass instruction to an aspirant:

"Enshrining the lotus feet of the Lord—or the exalted Guru—in his heart, the aspirant should enter into disciplined contemplation, gradually practising soham with the breath (or, energy), and raising it from the void of Muladhara through the subtle sushumna channel to the sky-like sahasraar upward in the head...."

She repeatedly stresses the importance of *pranayama* which leads from the control of breath to the control of the Supreme Energy. The Absolute is attainable by a vast diversity of ways.

In stanza No.22 she makes a confession of her progress:

"I fumbled my way cautiously and emerged into light submerging the five *indriyas**. Free from all such distractions and effacing the shade of duality, attaining identity with the Lord...."

The Kashmiri Sufi poet Nyaama Saeb expresses this attained identity in the words, *Pyomtsetäs tas chhu myon naav* (While I felt distracted in my search for the Lord I recalled that He bore the very name that is mine).

Her instructions are expressed in language appropriate for self-realisation: 'Be always awake', 'Never lose sight of your goal', 'Efface all trace of duality', 'Scrub clean the mirror of your heart', 'Offer your ego as an *aahuti* (libation) into the sacrificial fire as you offer grains, ghee, fruit, etc.', 'Make total surrender to the Lord' (Lal Ded: I am tugging my boat with a fragile unspun thread. Would that the Lord heard my plaint and ferried me across.)

The thirty-sixth stanza is in Hindi but for one

* Five *indriyas*: the sense perceptions that in their interaction cause distraction and delusion.

single word *vaal vashi* (a bird-trap made with strands from the tail of a horse.) It gives a first-hand experience of her self-realisation through love, meditation, non-duality and inner radiance. The *yogini* appears to have attained ecstasy while giving expression to it.

In stanza 39 she gives some details of her own life how Lalleshwari and her own father inspired her to steer clear of all delusions and perceive the reality of her inner being.

In stanzas 40 to 47 she takes the reader into confidence, hinting that she had come 'trailing clouds of glory' and indicates her progress in symbolic language. In stanza 49 the stress is on self-purification through absolute control over the 'eleven', i.e., five *Jnan indriyas*, five *karma indriyas* and the ego. In the words of the late Sir Arthur Quiller Coach, expressed in a different context, the message to an aspirant is 'murder your darlings' to achieve what Shakespeare expressed in 'calm of mind all passion spent!'

Stanzas 54-56 appear to have been composed when she was striving for full confidence in her self. She prays for the same grace and enlightenment as are embodied in Shankara. In the 59th stanza she elaborates the symbolism *yagnya*, the sacrificial fire: "Keep the fire blazing with the intensity of passion for the Truth". The next emphasises profound faith in the Lord: 'He destroys the vessel when He deems fit.'

The individual soul and the Absolute co-exist, and the latter does everything for the proper growth of the former. The individual soul is placed amidst duality, but when he graduates into non-duality after overcoming his limitations, he recognises that he is

no different from the Supreme Lord. (St. 87)

"Training of consciousness helps one to recognise oneself. The mortal body is a launching pad for the search to Eternity." (St. 95)

The 'technology' of the practice of *yoga* is brought into focus. The process of breathing awakens *Aham* or the Self within. He is verily the Divinity Incarnate within us.* 'Identify yourself with Him and you have attained Salvation', assures the Yogini. (St. 97)

"Once the ego is discarded, the aspirant has everything at his disposal: peace, joy, satisfaction!" (St. 99)

The Yogini appears to be almost within reach of her goal. (St. 101)

The Yogini advises that one should run far, far away from indulgence in experiences apparently tickling but leading to degrading, negative consequences. By doing so one progresses towards favours in the shape of lasting heavenly boons. The stanza appears to be an earlier composition. (St. 106)

"It is extremely rare to come across a *jiva* who abides in the Lord in every breath. Such *jivas* alone deserve to be regarded as *manushya* as remember the Lord within. The others are *pāsus* (cattle). A broken vessel is useless." (St. 111-112)

"I approached the Lord, the highest incarnation of bliss, through the dedication of the self, and my *chittā* felt regaled with bliss. The faculty of discrimination in me gained strength and momentum through the eternal, ever-abiding truth. My self appears like the vast throbbing, pulsating ocean, and merged in the

* An echo of the *shloka* from the Gita quoted on p. 33.

Eternal Self, and illuminates the whole Cosmos with the light of knowledge, love, peace and bliss.” (S t . 114)

Svanubhuvollasa—Dashakam (Ten *shlokas* on Self-realisation)

Language lacks the resources to convey to the finite mind the Infinitude of the Lord, or even attempt a profile of the Self-Realised *jiva*. At best one may attempt to convey in confusing disjointed expression what a Self-realised Soul is not, or cannot be: *n’ asti aāve, n’ asti aave* (not this, not even this....)

The *Yogini* starts with ‘I am not the earth, nor the seed, nor even water. I am not ether, nor the air, nor even lustre....’ These verses reveal the confidence and maturity of Rupa Bhavani when she completed her journey to her satisfaction! Having overcome all duality and transcended all worldly relationship she has arrived and abides in her Self: “I am He,”. The Supreme Lord and She, in fact, is He.

These stanzas appear to have been influenced in form by Adi Shankaracharya’s ‘Shivoham, Shivoham....’ (St. No. 1)

“Having merged in Him I am above *yoga* and *sannyasa*, and far above the *turiya* state of consciousness. The state is well above any intellectual yardsticks, and my being is merged in His. He cannot be realised through *Ida*,...”* (St. 10)

Towards the close of *Vakya Manjari* the *Yogini* offered clues that she had arrived. These thirty-two

* Pingala, etc. but He is identified when the aspirant awakens the Sushumna channel. He is above the three states of consciousness in the Turiya, abiding in the Absolute Lord, That I Am. (St. 10) .

stanzas which take the reader to higher and rarer regions confirm that impression. They reveal a certitude in the *Yogini* besides an interfused sense of harmony and tranquillity:

Nirvana Dashaki (*Salvation*)

"The Effulgence of the Lord is evident from every atom in the cosmos. He is *bahubal*, the Almighty One without a second, *svayambhu* (Self-realised, self-existent), and reveals Himself out of His own pleasure, through the Cosmic Dance. (St. 1)

"Through introspection, directing the vision inwards on the Absolute, the aspirant attains the highest state of God-Realisation.

Ishwari is the Supreme Sovereign Mother and Her glances bestow perfect bliss." (St. 2)

"Through a meaningful practice of Rajayoga one can attain peace and release from the cycle of birth and death." (St. 5)

Shri Rupa Bhavani Rahasya Upadesh

Like all aspirants, Rupa Bhavani took *vairagya*, renunciation and discarded many of her modes of thinking, modes of diet, dress, etc. She gives the reader an idea of such activities, but rounds up every stanza with the assertion, "I regained in different forms what I had discarded or renounced."

"Having enshrined my consciousness at the core of my inner being I recovered all that I had lost through renunciation. I got absorbed in the Trinity of Lal Ded, Madho (her father and *guru*) and Shiva, Transcendent and Immanent. I dedicated myself to introspection and nursed my consciousness in my *antar atman* till our identity

became unshakable. After the exercise of infallible circumspection I realised I had regained in different forms what I had discarded." (St. 1)

"You made Your presence felt by me after I discarded the intellectual approach to detachment. Introspection led me to the right path and I fixed my consciousness on the primordial sound *OM* to realise that though I had discarded much, I had been fully compensated in different ways." (St. 5)

"I effaced all the foul tendencies and my ego. Overcoming fear and false modesty, I experienced a glimpse of the Shiva form, pure, bright and glistening. Day and night lost their distinctive forms. I am the One and the same, in no way a loser, for whatever I had discarded has brought me ample compensation in different forms." (St. 7)

"Prosperity, fame and knowledge may accost an aspirant on the way, but these are of a transitory nature. The only source of everlasting light, knowledge and bliss is the Absolute. An aspirant can attain this stage if he perseveres in pursuit of his *Sahaj* (the highest Truth characterised by *sat*, *chit* and *anand* through *yoga* with single-minded dedication." (St. 9)

It would not be inappropriate to conclude this chapter with a few *vaakhs* of the *yogini* that give us a clear indication of her spiritual aspirations and her own tranquil satiety:

"He who has gone across the turbulent ocean of human frailties and recognises his own identity with the Absolute, will be able to guide others in the same pursuit, viz., realizing their own unity with the Maker. It is as simple and natural as the fact that a piece of dry pinewood acquires fragrance by contact with a piece of sandalwood. As a corollary, a God-realised person continues

to radiate fragrance, (i.e., knowledge and wisdom) to uplift others, acquire further refinement and enlightenment, ultimately recognising his identity with *sahaz* (ever-awake consciousness, real nature), even as proximity with sandalwood refines the appearance and value of a piece of pinewood....." (St. 77)

The diction is simple and the analogy radiates local colour.

"Wherever I cast my glance I found Him there unmistakably. In whatsoever manner I conducted my meditation, I perceived none but Him. He is the Lamp as also the Light radiated. He is the blazing Sun too. I recognized His true form in all these manifestations and merging myself in Him, I was beside myself with joy....." (St. 78)

Sufi poets portray this experience in the words *hama' oast* (He is everywhere and in everything). Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa is said to have practised penance, for some time, according to the disciplines followed by Christians and Muslims. He is said to have come to the same conclusions as through his own traditional ways of meditation.

"The Absolute is an embodiment of true or divine knowledge. The firmament, the divine (*anahat*, unstruck) sound and the final emancipation of the soul are His manifestations. He is everywhere and is ever ready to provide succour to the needy."

"Come my soul, let us recite the name of Shri Ram, pure and detached like air. He and I are one and the same. We breathe the name in every breath." (St. 81)

"I went in different directions and different countries to trace my soul that is no different from the Eternal Self. I got a clue of his stay in

the void. I placed all my petty tricks, vain desires and the ego under the millstone. As the rotating stone crushed into powder what was left of my ego, my duality disappeared; and the six thongs (sensory organs) holding me, viz., sound, touch, vision, taste, smell and the ego were swept away into oblivion." (St. 85)

Bhavani's Poetry

After the brief glimpses of the progress of Rupa Bhavani in Self-realisation, it would not be irrelevant to consider to what extent the discipline of *yoga* is related to poetic creation. That many poets have sprung from the ranks of prophets and saints suggests that the working of their minds may not be entirely dissimilar. The ancient Sanskritists regarded the evocation of *rasa* as the highest goal of poetic endeavour, and the experience of *rasa* by a *sahridaya*, or connoisseur, transcending the bounds of worldly experience was perceived to be identical with the realisation of Brahman. The ancients have placed the three ideals of *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram* (the everlasting, the ever-good and perfect beauty) before us, and purity of body, speech and mind was regarded as a pre-requisite for *rishis* as well as poets.

During the last couple of centuries the western societies have extolled poets as law-givers of the world while Bhatta Tauta, the mentor of Abhinavagupta, held that poets are always *rishis*. The influence of saint-poets on our society throughout the sub-continent cannot be over-emphasised. Mirabai, Tulasidas, Kabirdas, Surdas, Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-ud-din, Chaitanya and poets expressing themselves in other states, other languages and other

countries beyond our borders have contributed to the purification of the social environment.

In our country the Muslim Sufi poetry is said to have expressed disapproval of the rigid conservatism of some sects. For the Sufi poets themselves Ram and Rahim have never been two. Swami Ramatirtha burst out:

Yeh jag kya hai ajab anokha
Ki Ram mujh main main Ram main hoon

(This life is a riddle, for Rama abides in me and I am one with Rama). The ideal of such poetry has been to find God in the whole creation and thus attain union with Him...Sultan Bahu (A.D. 1631-91), a contemporary of Rupa Bhavani asserted *Na Oa Hindu na Oa Muslim* (He is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim) while Bulle Shah (A.D. 1680-1758), a younger contemporary of Rupa Bhavani ventilated an *advaitic* strain in such verses as

Awwal aakhir aap nu janaa
Naa koi dooja hore pahchana

(Thou art the first and the last, and there is none else besides Thee); and "Repeating Ranjha, Ranjha, friends, I have myself become Ranjha." It is the same spirit as put by Utpal Dev, saint, philosopher and poet, in the lines:

Where miseries become pleasure,
Where poison turns into nectar,
Where the world itself is transmuted into
liberation,
That is the path of Sankara.*

Rupa Bhavani has carved out for herself a

* Translated by N.K. Kotru.

distinguished place as a poetess in the mystic tradition in Kashmiri language. She was preceded by several poets in this role, including Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-din. Many more mystic/Sufi poets in the language flourished after her passing away in A.D. 1721. But the practitioners of the art of poetry are a strange lot, swimming with the current, through the current and sometimes against the current. More so are those that speak from mystic hindsight and obscure more than they reveal. Was Plato unjustified in banking their entry into his Republic?

Poetry that dropped from the lips of Lal Ded was inspired by her inner experience that spanned the whole cosmos. In the opinion of competent connoisseurs it was enlivened by a fire deep in her being. But when she draped the experience in her words, she used the language of the men and women one meets anywhere or everywhere. '*Aami p'na s'dras...*', for instance projects a total surrender to the Lord. With a few commonplace words *oam pa'n* (raw, untwisted thread), *s'd'r* (ocean), *naavi* (at the boat), *chha's* (I am), *la'maan* (tugging), 'would that my Lord heard (my plaint) and pulled me across...' The verse suggests surrender to the Lord with absolute faith. With such surrender even the gods would be moved to exercise their *karuna* (compassion) and pull the suppliant across. It could, perhaps, be possible for a master artist to draw a few lines with his/her brush to create the same effect. But Lal Ded has used a few words, commonplace words, and with her *pratibha*, her power of creativity, implanted an extraordinary effect in millions of hearts over the centuries. The faculty of etherial power, if it is legitimate to use the expression, has been revealed by the poetess in verse after verse, as in expressions:

'naab'd baa'ras ati gand de'ol gom... (the sling fixing load of candy on my shoulder has become loose (to a fault), *Ha'chivi haa'rinji petsuive kaan gom* (I have had to shoot from a bow of seasoned wood a reed in lieu of an arrow, and my palatial mansion has been entrusted to a silly, indifferent carpenter).

Such verses take the reader unawares and he is drenched with emotion and *rasa*. He shares the feelings of the creatrix of these verses that are the outcome of *pratibha*, the same refined energy that invests the sun with the radiance of *usha* (dawn).

Comparisons are odious and unfair. But a study of two works of art, or two poets, enables a reader not only to get an idea of the personalities concerned, but also uncover subtle nuances of the art, in this case poetry itself. Lal Ded and Roph Ded have been outstanding *yoginis* of the Valley and both attained immortality through their poetry. Read side by side with the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded whom Röph Ded adored as her *param guru* (venerable mentor/preceptor), the *vaakh* of the latter often appear tax precious. That many of the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded have baffled readers, devotees and scholars through the last six centuries to this day is not denied. Despite that the experiences embodied in her words get straightaway enshrined in the heart. The *vaakhs* of Rupa Bhavani do not exhibit the same transparency at first sight. Let us consider a verse from the *Jnanakhand* that is simple in diction and, virtually, of current vocabulary:

*Chhuna' kuney, chunna kuney,
Vuchh oard na' yoard kuney,
This phyur talai mool n' kuney,
Chhukhai tsaitan svori'tan sukuney*

'The Supreme Lord is nowhere to be seen,

absolutely nowhere. Cast your eyes in all directions, but He is nowhere. The Absolute is such a tree as gives no evidence of a root below the stump. If you are wide awake (i.e., gifted with intelligence) try to locate Him. (v. 86)

The concept of a flourishing but rootless tree is, as such, unmatched, conveying that the Lord is not tied down to any place but can be recognised by the sunlike *pratibha* (effulgence) emanating from His presence (v. 93). But the verse does not reflect the *pratibha* we have been looking for.

Rupa Bhavani appears to be pre-occupied with her yogic practice and meditation, as it normally should be. Perfection in *yoga* is only a stage in the struggle for Self-Realisation, but not the be-all and end-all of the endeavour. Her experiences appear to be weighing upon the flights of her imagination and the universalisation of her spirit. While reference to munching of hard kernels of hardened water-nuts impart local colour to the verse (No.95), and is welcome in its own place, it perhaps needs more fine-tuning to win over the reader with its finesse. The deeper we venture in evaluating Rupa Bhavani's poetry, the more risky it appears to be, for Kashmiri sensibility has been built over the centuries by intellectuals, philosophers, poets, aestheticians, critics and writers whose observations cannot be ignored. A significant remark of Kallata Hatta, "What is the good of the nectar of poetry unless even an ignorant person can thrill within, inundated by the stream of *rasa*?" Is matched by that of Anandavardhana that "Poetry makes insentient objects sentient!" Other stalwarts have been equally demanding in respect of poetic creation. While Vallabhadeva compares its "kick" to that of wine,

Bahamaha evaluates poetry by its most prominent *gunas* (qualities), of sweetness, clarity and forcefulness. Others expect the poet to embody *dhvani*, or superfine and creative suggestiveness in his work, adding at the same time that *dhvani* in poetry is not an end by itself.

While the present monograph does not offer scope for an indepth study of all these virtues of poetic creation, one cannot dismiss the criterion that the watershed between poetic and prosaic expression is the innate beauty of the former. Aesthetic delight and poetic appeal are held as indispensable for poetry, as ornaments for a damsel, with the unforgettable warning that the bracelet is not worn on the foot, nor the necklace round the girdle. *Rasa* (sentiment) is obviously the soul of poetry, and the sound aspect, including assonance, rhyme, medial rhyme, audial harmony, simile, metaphor, imagery, pictorialisation, local colour, super-normal insight or of the poet in the description of nature, incorporated judiciously, logically and with restraint contribute to a work of poetry the 'tang' of wine and not the surfeiting sweetness of honey. The poet is warned that he is not to *labour* at ornamentation.

Reference has been made above to an opinion that good poetry should thrill even an ignorant person. It is partially true but is not a blank cheque. What counts is the opinion of qualified readers and listeners, *sahridaya*, a person of taste, feeling and culture, a connoisseur. The aim of art is communication of feelings and experiences that at the highest level confer tranquil satiety on the listener/reader. T.S.Eliot has added another parameter to the theme in the following words:

"It is not the 'greatness', the intensity of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place that counts...."^{*}

That explains the observation that *rasa* transcends the bounds of worldly experience and its impact is always identical with the realisation of *Brahma* or Brahman.

This reminds us that under consideration is the poetic excellence of Rupa Bhavani who was engaged for eight decades with the realization of Brahman, and has left for our information an account of her experience in her *vaakhs*. Though Rupa Bhavani spent virtually the whole of her life in meditation, and there being no evidence that she ever attempted any practice in the art of composing poetry, there is little doubt about her meritorious deeds spread over several incarnations which, Anandavardhana asserts, confers on a poetic genius maturity so that poetry flows spontaneously. This is so despite the theme of her *vaakhs*: struggle for the final immersion in the Absolute. Her involvement in this pursuit at a level of consciousness higher than what is possible for common people distracted by the everyday problems of existence could, perhaps, be the inheritance of previous incarnations.

A reader is struck by the extensive use of symbolism in the *vaakh* of Rupa Bhavani. When a poet does not deem it appropriate to speak out his mind directly, he/she resorts to the use of symbolic phraseology, portraying unseen or unfamiliar conceptions/objects with the help of what is familiar.

^{*} *Tradition and the Individual Talent.*

In the very second *vaakh*, *Jnanakhand* brings in the symbol of holy fire with the body as the *agna'vatrēr* (the ingredients offered as oblation to the Deity) through which the poetess *yogini* advises the readers to forget their pre-occupation with the carnal body, or to eliminate one's attachment to it. In another *vaakh*, No.14, the symbolism extends to the field of archery in the words 'concentrate on shooting the arrow and worry not about the quiver', that is, one should continue incessantly in one's efforts for self-realisation and disregard any non-essential diversions.

While maintaining that 'the literary symbol is an image in its own right' and that a symbol is an excellent medium for conveying a piece of super-sensual knowledge, the authorities remind us that symbols may not reveal all their meanings immediately. One has to reflect upon the symbol, not once, not twice, but habitually to draw maximum benefit from its nectar. David Smith says that he recited verses perpetually, or lived them, till he got them right*. This is especially true of the poetical compositions of the mystic poets. In the words of the well-known English mystic poet Francis Thompson, "Imagery is entirely needful for expression to a poet of the *higher planes*."

Ga'nditha'i gvara'ni drayas tas bva'..... (v.100)

"I set out in His search after I gained complete control over the frailties associated with the physical frame. It is not a child's play to identify Him for, being omnipresent, there is no place where He is not.

* *Ratnakara's Haravijaya*, by David Smith, OUP, 1985.

He is above merit and sin, and there is no characteristic fragrance of the place where He stays."

'Gandith' is interpreted as 'suppressed', 'smothered', confined to a sack with its mouth securely knotted close, i.e., all limitations of the human body have been effaced'.

Kaah yeli dazan suh yiyi vaarey (v.49)

Kaah (eleven) stands for the *karma indriyas*, etc. The aspirant attains a positive stage when the 'eleven' are burnt out and purity ensured after the longing what one has lost, boils in the vessel and evaporates. Giving up passion is not that easy, being comparable to a cauldron on flames of sandalwood that takes long to cool.

Several symbols have been used here : *kah*, symbolic of *indriyas* , *su'h* : the leopard of longings and the ego, *hai* : sorrow, melancholy, for the objects of attachment, *grekh* : start boiling for evaporation, *boodas* : the all-pervading Lord, *bnvey* : he welcomes, *shehley* : (will) cool down, *kraai* : cauldron boiling on flames of sandalwood fuel (which (can) be cooled down and put out, as is the case with passion, lust, greed.... after herculean efforts).

A few other symbols used are :

wiping off frailties : grind corn under a millstone;
pounding with bare feet coarse
woollen fabric with soap
solution in a wooden/stone
mortar to improve its
quality..... (v.115)

a'g'n (flame) : youth
death : flight of a thief on exposure
(v.108)

deflated skin	: cessation of breathing
birth/life	: arrival of a guest (v.110)
<i>gupan</i> (cattle)	: those who forget the Lord..... (v.112)
person with	: a decrepit vessel (v. 112)
attachments	self crossing a stormy ocean
realisation	successfully
<i>vug'voani'</i> (irrigation through passing showers)	: meditation by fits and starts.

All poets make use of symbols to explain indirectly what they want to convey. Some images are conceptual and vague: as those used in Shelley's 'Skylark':

'Like a poet hidden in the light of thought'.

Some are visual like Wordsworth's:

'Then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils'

Some others, like Shakespeare's:

Nor poppy nor mandaragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Can medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday!

Ethereal like gossamer are sharp and precise as though serviced by a cybernetic computer.

Lal Ded too has used symbolic imagery, but most of the symbols bring concrete objects into focus :

(a) Religious instruction can make no impact on a dull head as a *dumat* (a super earthenware container) is immune to a hit from children playing marbles;

(b) With a deep ditch underneath, you dance on a tree,

How does your mind attune itself to the situation?

- (c) Try to shape sand into a tough cable.....None collects drippings from frozen ice, nor captures air within the fist..... The millstone turns ever so slowly and grinds fine

Rupa Bhavani also uses such symbolic imagery, but only selectively. She appears more esoteric all along and more pre-occupied with her only love, Self-Realisation. While Lal Ded is more at home in the vast world around her, nature and man, Rupa Bhavani does not appear to have time and inclination for anything other than the cherished goal.

Poets and mystics are commonly believed to be close to one another at higher planes of consciousness. The Indian aestheticians and philosophers have said that the human soul is not different from the cosmic soul but for the limitations laid on it by the ego. The limitation is partially lifted in the case of a poet. At not so high planes of consciousness a poet with his urges and desires is as good a man as any other non-poet, and as for indulgence Ghalib pleads his innocence : "I deserve to be tarred in the face if I drink for any delight or 'kick'. All that I seek is a momentary escape." The average man loves life with all its frailties, problems and inadequacies. He rejoices on spotting a flower, hearing a nightingale sing, or touching a lamb, and is thrilled by a look at beauty represented in the human form. His response to beauty is expressed in words, objects and deeds he is familiar with, which represent different phases/degrees of sublimation, but are earthy. The devotee anoints an idol with milk and adores the representation of the Deity with flowers.

Lal Ded reminds him that the stone of the idol is not different from the stone of the temple wall, whom to adore, therefore! The standpoint of the inebriated poet is endorsed also by Shakespeare in his reference to 'cakes and ale'. But the poet-aspirant has little choice, in the matter and he/she/her cannot sidetrack or deviate from his chosen path. He has no choice; he cannot deviate as he gets addicted to a more 'inebriating snack' in the shape of heavenly nectar, and if he does, the 'Hound of Heaven' chases him all through the cosmos. In sum, the character of Rupa Bhavani's verse is determined not so much by any limit in Rupa Bhavani's sensibility but by the course of life pre-ordained for her. A *yogini* of her conviction and certitude, insight and vision, nay, direct perception, could not take any other course, for the *vaakhs* composed by her sub-serve the main goal of her living, absorption in the Absolute, the Supreme Lord.

The situation calls for a brief review of the scope for the poet to air his/her emotions in a poetical composition. "Poetry begins in emotion recollected in tranquillity", declared Wordsworth, while T. S. Eliot,* considering it an inexact formula, stressed that poetry is not a 'turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion', note an 'expression of personality' but an 'escape from personality'. 'Emotion' and 'personality' 'emphasise duality and a *yogini* of the stature of Rupa Bhavani could have not truck with emotion, and for her *rasa* is, perhaps, identical with Brahman in the ancient Kashmiri tradition. The Kashmiri mystic poets of the last three centuries

* *Tradition and Individual Talent*

depict their pre-occupation in such pursuits even though they use the imagery of emotionally charged human lover and beloved. Some of these songs are frequently sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments and masters of the *sufiana* music try their utmost to evoke the *rasa* or soul of the composition.

Connoisseurs among the appreciative circle of listeners get attuned to the inner spirit of the song and imbibe the *rasa*.

If experiencing *rasa*, as authoritative aestheticians have observed, is identical with the realisation of Brahman, how much greater concentration on the part of the creative artist is required to compose a song/poem surcharged with a specific *rasa*?

An observer is slightly off the ground while dabbling in *rasa*. Raised to a higher pitch it reaches the realm of ecstasy; when in ecstasy Lord Shiva burst into cosmic dance. Mystic poets have occasionally given us a glimpse of their ecstasy, as Blake in his "Tiger, tiger, burning bright.....". One cannot with certainty find evidence of ecstatic notes in the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded, but Rupa Bhavani has struck the note in several of her stanzas :

*Draayas ta' nera'vun aaham zangey**
Tse na' ta' karvan mangey kas
Rangaa ra'ngi gul pholi' angey
Mey na' ta' beyi tseth tseengey kas (St. 8)

[—When I took the first step on the path leading

* In Kashmir when a person leaves his home on an errand, it is considered a good omen if his path is crossed on his right by a man of dignity, nobility, learning, etc., coming from the opposite direction.

to You, Lord, coming from the opposite direction, You gave me enough indication that success awaited me. From whom, as such, should I seek compassion except Yourself? I experienced an efflorescence in myself (like a fruit tree in spring). Who else but me could be buoyant in spirit ?]

The elation in spirit portrayed in a few words in this stanza is known only to the elite among the aspirants. Glimpses of this state of consciousness are found in such works as *Shiva Mahimna Stotra*, *Panchastavi*, *Shivstotravali*, and, doubtless, in the books of other faiths. The experience of Pushpdanta: 'The *yogi* finds himself in a tarn of nectar', is apparently shared on their own by other such writers. The late Dalip Kumar Roy, Sufi and poet, gave expression to the same spirit in his euology of Prophet Mohammad in the hymn:

Jab Chaley Shabey Maeraj
Jab chaley shabey Maeraj
Mohammad chaley shabey Maeraj,
Phool khiley taarey muskaye
Garhi milan ki aayi

[—When Prophet Mohammad set out for His tryst with Destiny the whole cosmos was vibrating with bliss. Flowers sprang to life, the stars could not but smile in ecstasy. It was the hour of fulfilment....]

Artistically this stanza is a gem linking the world of *yoga* and mysticism with minds and hearts responsive to creative art and poetry. It spells out the profound faith of the aspirant, the elation of the spirit, at the identification of the path marked for him, and the certainty that the individual self is about to be merged in the Eternal Self.

The diction is plain and simple and the normal

rhyme scheme ab,ab, but the subtle touches given by the poetess evolves a unique harmony out of these elements, resembling, perhaps, the harmony of the spheres. The elation and buoyancy in spirit, the inner mood for music and minstrelsy are reflected in the sonority of the diction: *zangey* (soft n), *mangey*, *ranga ra'ngi*...., imparting an onomatopoeic finish.

Another stanza, No. 63, runs as:

"Thou art always in my heart and I meditate on Thee. I make obeisance to the divine knowledge that binds us together so close: Thou and me are one!*

After I attained this realization I fell into super delight and blissful ecstasy, as I am aware of all the nuances that led me to Thee. If it were otherwise, my happiness would have been colourless."

In the original the 'n' sound is repeated several times which adds to the resonance of medial rhyme. These qualities are noticed also in stanzas no. 83, 84, 89, 96, 103, 114 and many more.

Even at the risk of a little prolixity it would be pardonable to refer to another stanza, No.101:

Sumbal yeerai vaa' tsus bai tas
Tombur saazai yus gom vash,
Shashidaari lava'dith Mahadevas,
Gombur totai kya boli wo'ni'

Rupa Bhavani portrays her absolute surrender through the symbol of a devotee actually floating down a stream unmindful of the consequences. The reader is reminded that Bhavani at Manigam used actually to float down the Shahkol canal where she was accosted by Shah Sadiq Qalandar.

* God pervades all His creation. When there is nothing but God, who should one blame?" *Adi Granth*

Here she explains that having effaced her ego and made total surrender, and coming very close to the Lord, 'She seeks merger by focussing her consciousness around Brahmarandra. This aroused in her an unstruck sound, or *anahat nada*, which was enchanting and musical in effect. She had come to a stage where the Lord is said to be at the mercy of the devotee. She offers to Lord Mahadeva nectar that drips on the moon digit in the head. The 'parrot' seeking salvation from the Eternal turns mute as there is nothing to ask when the donor and the seeker are one.

The stanza records the personal experience of the *Yogini* who has attained unearthly joy and bliss, and the diction cannot hide it. Repetition of sounds 'u', 'm', 'b' create an effect that is both onomatopoeic and musical.

The stanzas clearly indicate her certitude of having pursued her penance, meditation, self-introspection and self-realisation to her satisfaction. There are many more indications of this character. In stanza 103 she refers to herself as 'Röpa' auta'rey', i.e., Rupa, the incarnation of the Lord'. This certitude is further endorsed in *Svanubhollash Dashakam* (St.2,4,10). In the stanzas on *Eternal Peace*, with the refrain 'I have gained more than what I lost' she repeatedly asserts that after the completion of her disciplined penance she had gained enough to feel convinced that her compensation weighed far more than what she had lost by renouncing the frailties of life.

Matter and spirit co-exist and interact throughout the cosmos. The architect and the artist create majesty and beauty by infusing life into matter, the raw

material of their works of art, including paint, brick and marble. The raw material for the artistic exercise of the poet consists of words. A word is constituted by sound, or several sounds and has been regarded as sacred : " In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God!" Judicious use and manipulation of words through the sensibility and genius of the poet wrings poetry and music out of raw words even as in spring sapless trees are adorned with leaves, blossoms and delicious fruit.

An attempt has been made in a previous chapter to brief the reader on broad characteristics of the Kashmiri language. Without going to the remote past we find no difficulty in tracing the continuation of the form of Kashmiri diction from the fourteenth century onwards through the *Vaakhs* of Lal Ded, *shrukhs* of Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani, Habib Ullah Nowshehri, Haba Khatoon and other poets down to Rupa Bhavani's age (A.D.1625-1721). Kashmiri language had a high incidence of words of Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsha origin but absorbed, in course of time, words of Persian origin. The diction observed in the other poets mentioned above appears to be close in form and sense to the present age in comparison to the diction noticed in Rupa Bhavani.

That the language of Rupa Bhavani appears to be somewhat distant because of a higher percentage of the words of earlier ages cannot be denied. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient material except the surviving verse to help us judge the issue. It is true that *Loka Prakash* (11th century) presents many words of Kshemendra's age, but scribes of successive ages appear to have made their own contribution to the work and one cannot be sure of identifying words

chronologically. A few of the words that appear archaic in Rupa Bhavani's composition are given below:

Aahaa'rey nêraahaar : (fasting even after being fed; unaffected after apparent deviation)

aavrey : fills
arzun : attain
bhakchish : to a devotee

amsha gyanuk : a ray of knowledge
achint roop : unconceived form
bram : Brahm, or Bhrama
(delusion)

charan : feet
deeptha : radiance
g'gan : sky
gaja' : elephant

dishan : direction
gari : efface

hira-dai kamal : lotus of the heart
joth : light, effulgence

heents : socially low
hosh : awareness

kaai : body
nana ranga : of varied shades
neth'ai : everyday
proth : inclination
padip : tree

maha a sada'r : the vast ocean
nêvaan : salvation
nerakar : without form
prabha : transcendental knowledge
purak : exhaling breath

samrey : meditate upon
sarva' kala : full moon
tul pawan : inhalation
tattav : basic/subtle elements
thôr : hill

sang : quiver
sadhu sang : association of saints
tsetas : consciousness
teez : radiance

vokhnum : spoke (to me)
verey : for the sake of
yetse : yash, prosperity

tsedanandas : consciousness/bliss
vödhar : upliftment
vesmai : wonderstruck
vyādh : ailment

It would not be correct to presume that all these words are unfamiliar to the common people. Some of these, and similar others can be identified, especially in rural areas, but on the whole, they are regarded as unfamiliar, or rather more unfamiliar than the diction of Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-din. Bhavani's diction should normally have been more familiar than those who preceded her by more than two centuries. The explanation generally offered is that Bhavani gave utterance to what she felt. Devotees and readers

followed the text as closely as they could. It is worth remembering that the oldest manuscript of her *vaakhs* known as the Pingalina Mss was recorded barely fifty-three years after her demise! On the other hand the *vaakh* of her predecessor Lal Ded passed on from mouth to mouth for generations.* Though variations have crept into manuscript copies of her *vaakhs*, the diction stands, by and large, in the same form as in her own lifetime. Bhavani had good rapport with contemporary saints and aspirants, and the common people were highly impressed by the heights she attained in the search for Truth. She even demonstrated, though occasionally, her psychic powers, or 'miracles'. Lal Ded and the Sheikh were, on the other hand, in the category of "people's poets". They did not write out what they had to say. They simply gave utterance to what billowed up in their hearts, and their devotees and admirers recorded the same from time to time, each to the best of his ability and understanding. Probably, the very first recorded version displayed some variations with the authentic composition. Soon after the *vaakhs* were transferred to paper, or even before that, folk singers and minstrels took up these verses to entertain their audiences. The verses suffered slight modifications in diction gradually, either because of the limitations of the 'unread' artists or the demands of prosody as imagined by them. Over the years such modifications came closer to the actual speech of the people. Many archaic forms and words were dropped, or moulded

* The Pingalina Mss of Rupa Bhavani's *vaakhs* was first recorded in A.D.1774, fifty-three years after her demise, according to Somnath Pandit whose work has been published by the PG Deptt. of Kashmiri, University of Kashmir.

according to the level of the age. A similar fermentation was working through those admirers who loved to recite the *vaakhs* individually.

The process continued for several generations and, so to speak, each generation orally edited the respective *vaakhs* and *shrukhs* by its own sensibility. This happened even after some recorded versions became available. During the long interval between the passing away of the saint and the first-recorded version on paper people recited the *vaakhs* from the tablets of their hearts. It is also relevant to note that because of the affinity between them many of the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded got involuntarily incorporated in *Noornamas* compiled by the *rishi* disciples and devotees of Sheikh Noor-ud-din. On the other hand, the recorded diction of Rupa Bhavani have suffered only minor modifications because, despite its humanitarian spirit, her *vaakhs* did not attract folk singers *en masse*. It has also to be remembered that the songs of two other women poets, Haba Khatoon of the sixteenth century, and Arnimal, of the eighteenth century, also were updated in diction progressively through folksingers and minstrels who 'sold' their songs to widespread audiences.

Like most other poets of the Kashmiri language, Rupa Bhavani displays her felicity in the use of medial rhyme:

Vaasan, aasan, aasun, baasun(v.11)
aadorum, room room, torum, brem(v.19)

'room' now '*rum*', 'u' sound as in 'put'; *rum* meaning 'fibre' (as in every fibre.)

naava-taara vaava-svaaraa (v.32)
door tsal ta hoor kaanchh (v.47)

In several cases Rupa Bhavani has made a slight modification in the form of a word. *Ru'm* means a fibre or a membrane of the body, but she uses the word 'room' instead, perhaps to suit her prosody. It has to be noted that the word *rom*, with a slight modification has been used in Hindi also as in '*yehan rom rom main Ram hai....*' (Ram is seated in every fibre of my being). Similarly, she uses the word *maav* in place of *ma*, *kaarun* in place of *karuna* (compassion), *yod* in place of *yore* (here on this side), *s'* or in place of *so* (soham)

Rupa Bhavani has cast a few *vaakhs* in Hindi, either wholly or partially, in the tradition of *rekhta*. It is well-known that she could compose verse in Persian also, and a few of these survive:

*Ha'r ki shud mushtaqi ma nek akhtar ast,
Rutbaye mushtaqi ma balatar ast.*

[—Those who hold me in esteem enjoy a lofty status, for every one of them is gifted with good nature and purity of heart.]

We are, therefore, not surprised to find words of Persian origin throughout her *vaakhs*, viz. *takabur* (vanity), *gul* (flower), *vaav* wind, *boai* (smell), *haqai* (with truth), *saaqi* (cup-bearer), *pyala'*(cup), *vyuh* (mortal body), *peev* (sip, drink), *waaqai* (in truth), *khaak* (dust, clay).

A brief indication of her facility for an onomatopoetic turn to her *vaakhs* has already been given. A few more instances are: *brakun nabad* (munching candy/crystals of sugar), *wuga'vaney door sagavum ma* (I did not irrigate my holding with water from chance showers), *hyöt zan totan ta' haari guindun, posha' nool ta' veena vazey* (St.25), and

khasaan tai' shabad sha'num aahang, saarang, raag, veena taa' chang, provide, additionally, an inspiring pen-portrait of nature and its wonders. Diction, such as this indicates how she explores the potential of medial rhyme with dexterity and ease.

A poet's sensitive mind is influenced by words, metaphors, imagery, symbols, idioms which take their position in various layers of consciousness. They spring up pop under pressure of his/her emotional experience. In fact, imagery, metaphors, idioms, etc., in a language are the creation of poets, or writers with the sensibility of a poet, often impromptively. Imagery is one of the most cherished ornaments of poetry. An image is integral to the creative process in the personality of a poet:

*Hiding light under the bushel, grinding of teeth
and beating of breasts, casting the first stone, out
of the frying pan into the fire, the rising sun,
pouring cold water over.....*

A symbol can be personal but an image loses its grace and holding power if it fails to be universal :

*The same that of times have charmed magic
casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in
fairy lands forlorn.....*

is a never fading picture gallery.

Rupa Bhavani's *vaakhs* are interspersed with imagery that helps in the expression of a given state of mind:

Saa'rith ga'ta traa-vith gaash tsayas

[—I fumbled my way in the dark till I came into the light.]

Naava' tara ta' vaava' svara

[—try to cross the river in a boat propelled by winds]

Vuga' vaaney dooruy saga' rum ma

[—I did not water my holding with the help of chance showers, or in other words, I had to make herculean efforts to attain what I have.]

Gyana nama anek dhana' thana

[—The Vedas are a unique treasure-house of knowledge and wisdom.]

The relevance, or otherwise, between the form and content of Kashmiri poetry, between the theme and diction, came up for a threadbare debate in the region during the last forties and fifties. While it was bound to take place amidst new trends in writing in the whole country, especially in Hindi, Panjabi and Urdu, just close to Kashmir, the provocation came from Abdul Ahad Azad, educationist, poet and literary historiographer. As a progressive thinker, Azad believed that all creative writing should be draped in living idiom and diction native to the language, steering clear of wornout classical cliché (of Sanskrit and Persian). This is his stance throughout the two volumes of his work: *Kashmiri Zabaan Aur Shairi*, a history of Kashmiri poetry which he wrote in Urdu because Kashmiri prose was virtually non-existent then. Azad, influenced by the socialist movement in the sub-continent and elsewhere, endeavoured to serve the cause through his pen, but he died at an early age.

In the above-mentioned book, Azad indicates his approbation for both Hindu and Muslims poets who used the *living* Kashmiri language, thus giving a pat on the back to local patriotism. He directed the needle of disapproval, among others, towards the *vaakhs* of

Rupa Bhavani 'many of which are in Sanskritised Kashmiri'. He asserted that under the overwhelming influence of unfamiliar cultural trends writers should not lose sight of the local milieu.

Azad's work came up for a close study by the well-known literary figure and Jnanpith award-winner Ali Jawad Zaidi. With his commitment to secular and socialist culture, Zaidi examines with sympathy Azad's plea for the genuine local language as a 'medium of writing', and observes :

"The apparent double form in Kāshmiri diction is not limited to the language but is found in various measures in other national languages also. The poet is not to blame. It is the theme that, so to speak, dictates the form. The Sanskritists chose their theme from Sanskrit; the creative writing is, therefore, bound to be influenced by an influx of Sanskritised words, structures, etc. So also in Persian. A small village has limited needs which can be met by the local dialect, but a language aspiring for enrichment and progress cannot attain it through the local diction and idiom alone....."

English was once looked upon as 'island-bound' but attained enviable progress when it trespassed the boundaries after A.D. 1066. Azad's plea, on the basis of a limited number of verses, that dependence on other languages, is not necessary for undeveloped languages does not move Zaidi. "Spiritual, moral, social and political themes," he observes, "and discussions in detail on inter-provincial and international matters and events need thousands of new words, structures, metaphors that can be provided only by such languages as trespass the

village and block border to seek national and international stature". Kashmiri also sought support from these classical languages as they commanded religious and cultural resources, including idioms, structures, etc. During the last few decades Kashmiri has developed new literary forms, as full length play, TV and radio play, short stories, novels, sonnets, operas, etc. Dozens of daily papers appear regularly feeding a hungry readership with news, views, and commentaries. Preachers, religious leaders, political analysts, sports commentators and scientists have also contributed to the enrichment of the language.

Paramanand, Prakasharam and many Sufi poets sought the resources of Sanskritised words and diction in giving vent to their feelings and experiences. Paramanand was once accused of writing in Sanskritised Kashmiri. He composed impromptively another set of verses in Persianised Kashmiri, thereby confirming that diction, structures, etc., have to subserve the needs of the theme. That brings us back to Kshemendra's *aucitya*, parts and particles of a composition being related to the whole by an inner unity and appropriate relationship.

Finally, Azad is quoted by Zaidi as saying that if all words embodying technical and cultural concepts are drained out from Kashmiri, it is left crippled. Azad himself exonerates Krishna Razdan of the charge of using Sanskritised diction in his Kashmiri *lilas* and *bhajans* because the themes of his compositions cannot be developed exclusively in current (i.e. as it was about a hundred years back) 'Kashmiri dominated by Persian and Arabic diction'. The appropriate milieu as projected by Krishna'

Razdan, Azad is believed to have held, could not be projected without an adequate spicing of diction of Sanskrit origin. □

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Rupa Bhavani (1625-1721) is the second well-known mystic poet of Kashmir after Lal Ded. Born in 1625 (some say 1621), with her mastery in Sanskrit, Persian and Hindustani, she was well-versed in Vedanta, Upanishads and Shaivism. Her *vaakhs* have come to us in the usual oral tradition. It is believed that the Hindi text entitled *Rupa Bhavani Rahasyopadesha* (the mysterious spiritual teachings of Rupa) is the most detailed text available. It is generally said that the language of her *vaakhs* is archaic, with more than one meaning to what she said. Her *vaakhs* show the influence of Kashmir Shaivism and Islamic Sufism.

Her poetry appears to be rooted in her predestined role as a Yogini. It is in this role that she has touched the lives of common people since the days when she acquired fame for her 'miracles'. Though Rupa Bhavani spent virtually the whole of her life in meditation and there is little evidence that she ever attempted the art of composing poetry, the *vaakhs* which have come down to us as hers show definite signs of rare poetic genius and meditative maturity.

S.L. Sadhu (b. 1917) writes in Kashmiri and English. He has eleven books to his credit, which include *Folk Tales from Kashmir* and *Habba Khatoon*. He is a recipient of many awards including J&K Cultural Academy Award.