

Chapter 4

Body and Beyond: An Analysis of Later Bhakti Poets—Lal Ded and Mirabai

Literature has always performed as a significant cause for the conversion stretching from individual and communal and then to the literary realm. Poetry, as an important literary genre has also worked at multiple levels for various purposes. For some people, it intended at the spiritual conversion in the sacred formula, whereas for others it served as a strong podium for individual manifestation of emotions and feelings. Some others used poetry as a means to teaching technique, while for some others it was an automobile for guiding a revolution at the world and transforming the same. It has continuously comprehended within its dominion approximately all facets of human life-its worries, outlooks and longings. Poetry existed in the procedure of folktales delivered from one generation to other either verbally or using the customs of sacred teachings or songs. This chapter aims at exploring the use of poetry as a means of expressing love and emotions to the conservative world by two medieval Indian mystic women poets, Lalleshwari/Lal Ded and Mirabai. Both these poets belong to two diverse cultures, diverse sensibilities and diverse ethnicities. But the mutual thread found between the two is their mystically emotional poetic sensibility.

The medieval India witnessed various growths in the areas of arts and literature. It has substantial literary output which later paved way for the development of modern and contemporary literature. As already discussed about two significant South Indian poets Andal and Akka Mahadevi in the previous chapter and their modes of Bhakti, this chapter deals with Lal Ded and Mirabai, two later mystic poets from North India.

In a period of great turmoil and intolerance in the valleys of Kashmir, a woman mystic appeared to sing and praise the *vakhs* (songs) of God and spread harmony and peace. Kashmir valleys of medieval days had a great influence of Sufism. But, Lal Ded endeared herself to both Muslim and Hindu communities. P. Govinda Pillai in his book *The Bhakti Movement: Renaissance or Revivalism* points out that:

As in the case of Kabir Das, upon her death, her Hindu and Muslim admirers claimed the body for the right to conduct the funeral rites according to their respective rituals and customs. Even her name was altered to suit the tastes of each community. The name her parents gave was Padmavathi. However, after she left her parent's home to be a wandering minstrel and apostle, Hindus called her Lalla and Muslims addressed her as Lalla Arifa. In due course, all her admirers and worshipers affectionately called her Lal Ded-meaning 'Lal the Mother'. (170-171)

The stories about the childhood and formative years of Lal Ded are also wrapped in myths and legends as like other medieval mystic poets. Too many details are still matters of great controversy. The general consensus suggests that she was born in AD 1335 to a Hindu Pundit family near Srinagar. She was earlier attracted to Trika Saivism and was married at the age of twelve into a rich Pundit family. Myths suggest that her mother-in-law was not very happy with her behaviors of independent views and lifestyle rather than being a 'modest and submissive' homemaker. Unable to bear the atrocities in her husband's family, she walked out of the home, leaving her graceless marriage, without even caring about her clothes, ornaments and other personal belongings and accepted a homeless life. She wandered all along through the valleys of Kashmir, lived in forests and appeared on streets and pavements with beggars and mendicants. This strange life of Lal Ded resembled that of Akka Mahadevi. Soon, several followers

including both Hindus and Muslims accompanied her and they formed a sect. (Pillai 171-172) Lal Ded sings:

My master gave me just one rule

Forget the outside, get to the inside of things.

I, Lalla, took that teaching to the heart.

From that day, I've danced naked. (Hoskote 97)

Legends say that she went forth confidently naked, singing her *vakhs* happily, dancing on the roads with utmost pleasure. The guru might be her Lord. Generally, as per Hindu Bhakti movement history Lal Ded is considered as an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva (Saivite) and hence included in the Kashmir Saivism.

The way she renders her *vakhs* makes her different from other mystic poets. They are in the form of teachings from a guru. When other poets like Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Mirabai, Gangasati or Bahinabai sang glorious devotional songs containing socio-political messages melodically making them beautiful outpourings of pure *Madhurya Bhakti*/Bridal Mysticism, Lal Ded's lyrics (*vakhs*) carried moral messages for harmony and peace among those people who were always obsessed with religious and casteist conflicts. Her lyrics were not devotional melodies, but religious and socio-political teachings. They were simple and therefore meant for even illiterate people. Occasionally, those verses raised philosophical and metaphysical questions. Like her predecessors, human physical body and desires were a strong subject matter to Lal Ded too. Andrew Schelling in his book *Love and the Turning Seasons* points out that:

One Muslim chronicler says she danced in ecstasy "like the Hebrew *nabis* of the old and more recent Dervishes." Islamic writers chronicles her encounters with

their holy men, while Hindu texts tell of gurus. The Kashmir of her day held Buddhists, Nath yogins, Brahman teachers and Sufis and Tantric adepts. She may have learned something from each of them, still, she seem to have considered herself a dedicated Saivite yogini (practitioner dedicated to Shiva); tales of insight and supernatural power surpassing that of her instructors began to circulate. (Schelling 90)

Her lyrics dealt with peace and harmony. In fact, as said earlier, they were teachings to a torn society of unnecessary turmoil and intolerance. Her teachings were from her heart; from her soul. Hence, human physical body and beyond body became a recurring constituent for her *vakhs*. Even the term 'I', symbolized body, negating body and hence negating human egos. She never tried to negate physical body, but travels beyond body. According to her, the emptiness of the body appealed more to her rather than the bodily flesh. Therefore, her lyrics became physical as well as metaphysical. Lal Ded, through her lyrics tries to convey that soul fills the vacuum of the body and hence a completeness is attained. Like light and darkness, there always lies a conflict between spirituality and consumerism – emptiness and consumerism. For Lal Ded, writing about physical body is not just an expression of bodily desire but it travels long beyond the physical existence of body to a high spiritual level. It is the confused soul of man that is always searching for God. He/She repeatedly questions the social rites and rituals. When he/she enters the stage of enlightenment the soul is set free and attain ultimate happiness. Here, man is set free from his social, political, religious and cultural traumas of the outside world and gain pure salvation. This happiness led to go beyond senses. Lal Ded, at this point, dances with her soul. She sings:

I gave myself to him, body and soul,

became a bell that the clear note of Him range through.

Thoughts fixed on Him, I flew through the sky

and unlocked the mysteries of heaven and hell. (Hoskote 114)

The above verses of Lal Ded expose that she was a woman who was aware of her personal desires, emotions, feelings and thoughts. With all these personal spirits she finds happiness in submitting herself to the Lord. She suffered from severe prosecutions and pains owing to her transgressing mental psyche but still stood firm in her body and soul and stayed unaffected by the worldly sentiments. She intelligently managed to deal the myths about heaven and hell. She was a brave woman who was aware of the social conditions of her period and courageously used it for rising above the same. She could only use her firm belief in her God to move forward successfully.

Lal Ded's lyrical quality in her stanzas transitions from that of an intelligent hermit to an analyst, to a pastor to an intense yearning lover to that of a proficient yogini who has already achieved the stage of eternal delight. Therefore her lyrics are the straight expressions of her insightful spiritual understandings, skills of being a brave yogini who was skilled in the arduous religious segments and spiritual performances of Kashmir Saivism. Also, she was exposed to the notions and pictures of the other customs and traditions that were predominant during her days. Ranjit Hoskote in the Introduction to his book *I, Lalla: the Poems of Lal Ded* points out:

Lalla's poems shimmer with their author's experience of being a yogini, trained in demanding spiritual disciplines and devotional practices of Kashmir Saivite mysticism. Since this school is itself the confluential outcome of an engagement with several philosophical traditions, she was receptive to the images and ideas of those other traditions. It would be most productive to view her as a figure

whose ideas straddled the domains of Kashmir Saivism, Tantra, Yoga and Yogacara Buddhism, and who appears to have been socially acquainted with the ideas and practices of the Sufis. (xix)

Acknowledgement or “*pratyabhijna*” is a significant experience of transformation in the principles Kashmir Saivism. Since she was influenced by the Saivite tradition of Kashmir valleys, it appears in her lyrics. She sings:

Lord! I’ve never known who I really am, or You.

I threw my love away on this lousy carcass

and never figured it out: You’re me, I’m You.

All I ever did was doubt: Who am I? Who are You? (Hoskote 27)

Lal Ded, in the above lines, herself regrets for being blinded by the body-centred perceptions and suspecting the exact nature of the God and of the self as she differentiates both. In other words, she is her own chastiser for concentrating too much on the physical body and personal individuality. But later she achieved the high stage of recognition of unity of seeker and the target, of the self and the Self and substantiates passionate authentications of her understandings.

Wrapped up in Yourself, You hid from me.

All day I looked for You

and when I found You hiding inside me,

I ran wild, playing now me, now You. (Hoskote 17)

The above lines specify the metaphor of ‘lila’ This is a term mentioned in Sanskrit to indicate the hide and seek game between the God and the devotee. In Lal ded’s verses,

the physical body occupies primary significance because it is the centre to all her experiments in self-refinement. According to her, the symbolic and the sensuously distinguishable are never contrary but instruct each other. This game is pensive as well as euphoric where the Self and the other Self understands the oneness in two. Therefore this transgress later into complete ecstasy where the devotee unifies with the lord. According to Lal Ded, the individual self and the universal Self are actually same but the materialistic desires of man and the deceptive character of the outer world always work as hindrances to this supreme consciousness. Lal Ded says:

Who sees Self as Other, Other as Self,
 who sees day as night, night as day,
 whose mind does not dance between opposites,
 he alone has seen the Teacher
 who is first among Gods.

Lal Ded's situation was very worse during her days as she was a female saint who left her domestic bonds. The society floats insults against her which she suffered silently but still faced the atrocities boldly and kept herself strong and immune to their curses. Lal Ded says:

They lash me with insults, serenade me with curses.
 Their barking means nothing to me.
 Even if they came with soul-flowers to offer,
 I couldn't care less. Untouched, I move on. (Hoskote 94)

She faced all the pains and found pleasure in devoting her Lord. She moved beyond them and always had the realization that, “I belong to Siva” (Hoskote 95). Moreover, Lal Ded explains that her spirit is now enlightened and has developed into a clear mirror that is conscious of the lord’s existence. The mirror shines more and more in accordance with the worries and troubles she faces. It shows her intense faith and love in her lord. She finds herself protected by Lord Shiva, with whom she reaches into her ecstasy. Lal Ded declares:

Let them hurl a thousand curses at me,

Pain finds no purchase in my heart.

I belong to Siva. Can a scatter of ashes

Ruin a mirror? It gleams. (Hoskote 95)

Lal Ded illustrated human love all along her verses. Those *vakhs* showcased misery and aversion as the consequences of an unfair world, of a biased culture and prejudiced civilisation. Lal Ded protested against ostentation, treachery, injustice and wished for autonomy from material desires of the world. The dilemmas suffered by virtuous people and deprived folks were visible to her. Through her lyrics, she submits herself to her Lord so that she will be deprived of all the material desires. There arises philosophical cravings in her *vakhs*, where she wishes to join with her lord. Lal Ded sings:

As the moonlight faded, I called out to the mad women

eased her pain with the love of god.

‘It’s Lalla, it’s Lalla,’ I cried, waking up the Loved one.

I mixed with Him and drowned in a crystal lake. (Hoskote 49)

She plays with various personae: Lal Ded is the mad woman. Also, she is the one who brings ease to the madwoman with intense love of Lord. The Self is the loved one. She wishes to wake up and join with Him. Hoskote describes it as, “this process of union marks the falling away of all karmic defilements and the attainment of an indescribable clarity of being”.

Lal Ded in one of her poems happily declares that her Lord is the one who shelters her from all the worldly miseries. Her intense love, dedication and desire to join with Him makes her forget all her sorrows. By happily submitting her body and soul to her Lord, she finds extreme happiness. The stage of trance or enlightenment happens when the devotee submits herself and the soul travels beyond the body. There the devotee finds pure reconciliation. She herself addresses her as a bell that rang when the Lord’s notes ran through her. Lal Ded sings:

I gave myself to Him, body and soul,
became a bell that the clear note of Him rang through.

Thoughts fixed on Him, I flew through the sky

An unlocked the mysteries of heaven and hell. (Hoskote 114)

She finds satisfaction in the purification of physical body. She compares her body with that of an ocean where new moon purifies and refines a static ocean each time. These lines symbolizes Lal Ded’s belief in the existence of physical body and resembles that of Andal’s *pavai nombu* of *Margali* month where the maidens bath early morning to worship Lord Krishna, their eternal lover. Lal Ded says:

New mind, New moon.

I’ve seen the great ocean made new.

Ever since I've scouted my body and mind,

I, Lalla, have been as new as new can be! (Hoskote 119)

Lal Ded also mentions about the existence of physical body in several other verses too. The analysis of these lyrics substantiates her belief in physical body and how the body gets transformed into metaphysical state where the devotee reaches complete trance. She never negates body but has faith in it. Actually, her *vakhs* explains how the individual Self travels from a physical body and reaches into ecstasy state to merge with the universal self. She uses material images, similes and metaphors to justify her teachings. The supreme idea present is how universal love is formed using devotion. Physical body becomes a major tool in describing the transformation of human soul. Lal Ded says:

True mind, look inside the body,

this body they call the Self's own form.

Strip off greed and lust, polish this body,

this body as bright as the sun. (Hoskote 143)

Lal Ded, at times, is found trapped in between life and death. The ambiguity about the quest of Self always worried her. Sometimes, she ends her lyrics with this ambiguity about life beyond body. For example, Lal Ded says:

I pestled my heart in love's mortar,

roasted it and ate it up.

I kept you cool but you can bet I wasn't sure

whether I'd live or die. (Hoskote 52)

Here, in the above lines, Lal Ded narrates in a more vigorous way about how she pestles her heart in the mortar of love, then roasted it and ate. The love for the Divine quickly overflows and attains a very productive restraint over desire. But still, Lal Ded storms over a great doubt. Even after the Self sacrifices itself at the altar of the Self, can the questor live or die. This indirectly ponders that whether her life would continue same as before or whether it would get completely transformed. The power of love and the transformation of Self is explained here.

Lal Ded describes the unification of Self powerfully in another verse, pointing out the visual images of Shiva and Shakti, that could indirectly denotes the *Ardhanareeshara* thought of Saivism. According to Hindu mythology, it is from Lord Shiva, the universe begins and the extreme form of man-woman love is portrayed using the metaphor of *Ardhanareeshara* image. Lal Ded describes:

I, Lalla, came through the gate of my soul's jasmine garden

And found Siva and Shakti there, locked in love!

Drunk with joy, I threw myself into the lake of nectar.

Who cares if I'm dead woman walking! (Hoskote 70)

It is one of the most beautiful verses of Lal Ded. It is highly sensuous and carries extreme devotion to the lord and embraces Him with wild passion. Here, the love of the devotee does not surrender but emancipates and overflows. Her image enters with fragrance and beauty of jasmine flowers. The opening lines bring a visual treat, which is not so common in Lal Ded. The combined images of Shiva and Shakti denotes of sexual union with lord. She overcomes every obstacle in her pathway and then enters into a state of supreme transcendence, which found space in the principles of Tantric philosophy. Her body passes beyond the physical state of life and death and reaches into

a large lake filled with sweet nectar. This indicates that Lal Ded entered into ecstasy. The divine coupling of Shiva and Shakti is a sacred symbol in Tantric culture. Lal Ded also explains the existence of physical body in connection with Lord Shiva in other verses too. For example, she says:

He who strikes the Unstruck sound
 calls space his body and emptiness his home,
 who has neither name, nor colour, nor family, nor form,
 who, meditating on Himself, is both source and sound
 is the god who shall mount and ride his horse. (Hoskote 80)

For Lal Ded, Lord Shiva is a supreme manifestation of the Supreme. He is compared to a horse who rides into enlightenment. He is the one who controls the entire universe. In the above verses, the Self of the devotee rises within the Self of the Lord. His body is space and His home is a mystical void. He is never constrained by any binaries or worldly obstacles. Lal Ded declares Him as 'both source and sound'. This resembles that of Kashmir Saivism where the Supreme Being resides within one's refined body as energy. When the devotee is dipped in extreme devotion, the initial state of enlightenment occurs and the devotee receives blessings (source). This, transformation awakens as a primal cry (sound). The metaphysical stage of body is manifested by Lal Ded. The significance of any rites or rituals is explained where-devotee's truthful mind set in perfect devotion is relevant. The emptiness of body gains significance rather than bodily flesh.

While explaining about the significance of metaphysical body she never negates the existence of physical bodies. She explains physical bodies as material images which

communicates universal truths. It is the physical body that contains ego, jealousy, gluttony etc., they are the part of consumerism. It is only by describing the nature and existence of physical body one can define the significance of body beyond physical (metaphysical). The intense love of devotion begins with physical body and reaches ecstasy with metaphysical state. Lal Ded describes the instability and inconsistency of physical body as:

This body that you're fussing over
 this body that you're dolling up,
 this body that you're wearing to the party,
 this body will end as ash. (Hoskote 142)

Lal Ded describes that physical body is perishable in all ways. In Hoskote's words, "Lalla deplores the obsession with the body as an obsession of the doomed and futile vanity. This poem has the ring of meditation intended to guide the aspirant beyond normal". (231) It travels beyond the physical body centred psyche, and later on passes beyond the deceptions on the stability of physical body, its internal desires, cravings, peculiarities etc. This mortality regarding human physical body is well explained in other religious and cultural traditions. For example, the Tantrayana meditation on human skull, the Aghora Saivite devotees who worship on cemeteries, Catholic practice of contemplation on ossuary etc. The idea further explains the instability of physical existence in the mortal world and travelling beyond the body and bodily senses.

Lal Ded, searches for her lord as a wanderer or questor. Her lyrics are sometimes purely personal where she is the central character. She says:

I, Lalla, wore myself down searching for Him

and found a strength after my strength had died.

I came to His threshold but found the door bolted.

I locked the door with my eyes and looked at Him. (Hoskote 13)

In the above lines, Lal Ded is a wanderer. But, her quest became vain and the door was closed before her. But, at the end, she found a large pool of energy whose existence she was ignorant till then. This is a common situation mystics face, similar to that of athletes. In another way, Lal Ded here becomes an athlete of self-overcoming. The language she used is spiritual, but the meaning it conveys is the travel of her body. She focuses on her intense love towards Him, cleansed and strengthened by her stubborn nature and endurance on her Lord, she continues her quest by singing:

Love-mad, I, Lalla, started out,

spent days and nights on the trail.

Circling back, I found the teacher in my own house.

What brilliant luck, I said, and hugged him. (Hoskote 15)

The passionate quest of Lal Ded to meet her eternal Lord continues in the above lines. She describes herself as a mad lover. But she experiences a curve at the end. She wanders all along in search of the field of experience but unluckily returns home – the place of her Self. At home, she found her teacher; what she thought would find in the outer world. A great distance became a matter of intimate proximity. The Lord is within one's Self. The unification with Him takes place when the Self of the physical body unites with the universal Self. The realisation regarding the identity of Self and Self must be attained through the path of devotion. Lal Ded should look within herself, not outside.

Sometimes Lal Ded's verses becomes sensuous and melancholic. A deep serenity arises in her verses that depicts the feelings of an innocent lover who feels the grief of separation from her beloved. Lal Ded sings:

Royal swan, what happened to your beautiful face?

Someone's robbed you and you can't even say who or what.

The mill's stopped grinding, its mouth looked choked

and where's the grain? The miller's got clean away! (Hoskote 23)

Here, the thief who robbed the voice and the disappeared miller are one, the Divine power.

Lal Ded's verses gleam with her personal experiences of being a mystic rebel who is perfectly trained in the disciplines and doctrines of Kashmir Saivism. Since, the Saivite school of Kashmir itself was an outcome of several other religious and cultural outcomes, Lal Ded was also connected with the imageries and ideologies of other civilisations. These include Kashmir Saivism, Yoga culture, Tantric beliefs, Yogacara Buddhism and the Sufi practices related to Islam. In the Introduction to the book *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*, Ranjit Hoskote explains:

Revelation comes to Lalla like a moon flowering in dark water. Her symbols and allegories can be cryptic, and yet the candour of her poems moves us deeply, viscerally. She celebrates perseverance in the quest, contrasting physical agony with spiritual flight and dwelling on the obdurate landscapes that the questor must negotiate. Lal Ded's poetry is fortified by a palpable first-hand experience of illumination; it conveys a freedom from the mortal fright of fear and vacillation. (Hoskote xix-xx)

Lal Ded's *vakhs* carries her inner consciousness of mortal life and the body beyond worldly existence. Those verses demonstrate about the raw sides of mortal life – of ego and jealousy that occupies human mind. These are produced from the unending material needs of man which is built upon consumerism. Lal Ded is fighting against this consumerist culture using spirituality. The concepts of metaphysical bodies and the levels after philosophical cravings underscores the major themes of her verses. Her writing of the body is not just expressing her physical desires and cravings, but mentioning about the 'body beyond body'.

Lal Ded advocated that the only method to connect to the Divine spirit (that has in it everything for universe) is to give up the physical desires entirely i.e., he/she must surrender their physical body and meditate consciously to accept the metaphysical stage of body. She supported a whole bodied life. It is only through the use of physical body and the bodily senses that man can experience anything on the world. Hence, the physical body need to be purified, protected and nourished with great care. The Supreme Being of Lal Ded's *vakhs* indirectly denotes Lord Shiva. According to Hindu legends Shiva is actually formless and has no beginning or end. This image can be easily connected with the formless God of Quran. People sense insights in her views and could find mysticism only when they study to unlearn the different conducts of the material world and look within. As god is the part of every animate as well as inanimate creatures, He becomes a part of humans. We need to look inside rather than search outside. Ranjit Hoskote tried to include these necessary elements of Lal Ded.

The physical world is considered as a home where knowledge and aptitudes cannot protect man from the wrenches of death and their personal sorrows. Those people who do not value any obligations or receive any deserving accolades are more and more admired and attain every basic amenity. This inequality was severe in the society and

this later became a subject of sorrow, agony and pain for Lal Ded. She described her experiences directly using her verses and thereby making them free and hence, spreading consciousness. Lal Ded educated individuals to grow above the deceptive world and attain the actual understanding of matters. Lal Ded says:

I, Lalla, set out to bloom like a cotton flower

The cleaner tore me, the carder shredded me on his bow.

The gossamer: that was I

the spinning woman lifted from her wheel.

At the weaver's, they hung me out on the loom. (Hoskote 40)

Lal Ded's poems communicate that she was a strong woman aware of her personal desires, emotional feelings and intellect thoughts. Still, she suffered many trials and pains because of her transgressing soul but stood sturdy in her physical body and spirit by continuing modest by the public attitudes. In the above *vakh*, Lal Ded portrays her coming to the material world as a beautiful flower filled with eagerness, potential and several other possibilities but upon getting harder setbacks from the people. Lal Ded felt an internal need to outdo the generally allocated roles of common man. She compares herself purifying her with rubbing a piece of cloth and dashing it on a stone slab to wash out the dirt in it. Her worldly identity and Self is washed off. The washerman in this stanza recounts to the self that exists within her, that desires to touch the Supreme Being and therefore involves in actions which permitted Lal Ded to rise above her ordinary feminine self. Every bit of the torn cloth represents the shred personality of Lal Ded and makes her true identity to rise up. Lal Ded as a lovely daughter, Lal Ded as a submissive daughter-in-law and Lal Ded as a dutiful wife, all these split characters left hold of her life and she arose as a powerful woman unconditionally refusing to confine

to the socio-culturally established means of feminine behaviours. Consequently, her teachings, deeds and experiences encouraged many other women of North to enter into the sphere of love and mysticism. The most noteworthy among these poets is Mirabai of Rajasthan.

Mira is considered as the most celebrated female mystic poet of India. Her verses (*padas*) are sung in the vernacular languages of the places where she lived like, Marwari, Gujarati and Rajasthani. Her verses always portrayed the epitome of *prema bhakti* and are still recognised as classics in the area of Indian devotional literature. By virtue of her extreme devotion and supreme faith in her lover and singing his songs melodiously, Mira has made herself everlasting to many generations of Vaishnava (Krishna) devotees. Her songs easily convert a devotee into the mood of perfect transcendental bliss. They exemplify the cry of a devotee from the soul, lamenting, with intense yearning of true love, to hug eternity. She was born in Rajasthan at a time of the golden age of Hindi poetry. Kabirdas, Surdas, Tulsidas, Jayasi and Malik Mohammed were some of her contemporaries. The stories Bhagavata Purana resulted in the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in the form of Krishna. Like Kabir, Tulsidas and Surdas, Mira also developed a devotional intimation towards Lord Krishna, who she considered as her beloved lover.

Mira is recognised as a pole star on the horizon of supreme devotion who sang songs of eternal love for her beloved lover, Lord Krishna. These songs still remain unparalleled in the realm of Bhakti cult. The name 'Mira' itself has later become identical with the feeling of true devotion. Many scholars had interpreted her name in different ways. For some critics, 'Mira' articulates the spirit of her illumined mystic life style. In different Indian languages the name 'Mira' has different meanings. In Hindi 'Mira' means 'light' whereas in Sanskrit 'mir' means 'ocean'; in Rajasthani dialect the

name has its roots in the word Mera, meaning a bumper-harvest. Light, Ocean or Harvest – three of them shows richness and prosperity. The light she brought into the lives of many ardent devotees gleams with full spirit and her songs still enthrals the hearts of many devotees. Mira was an ocean filled with supreme love towards her lord: the love towards immortality. Also, the entire life of Mira was a rich harvest season of sheer devotion.

The birth and childhood of Mira has been calculated using several folklore and tales related with her. It is estimated that she was born around 1498 as a Rajput princess in Rajasthan. The legends about Mira says that during her childhood, she was gifted an idol of Lord Krishna by a wandering mendicant. She developed love for Him at the age of five, when her mother answered to one of her questions that Giridhara Gopala is her groom. But, her destiny made her to marry King Bhojraj. With the sudden death of her husband and the compulsion from her in laws to practise the widow duties all along her life, she left her husband's home, considering herself as a mad lover of Lord Krishna. Her love and interest deepened as she grew. Her love for Krishna is seen in her lyrical compositions too.

The exceptionality of her lyrics lies in the effort that they attempt to produce those voices that cannot be voiced. No kind of stress and strain is felt in her renderings. They are pure melodies of everlasting love and affection. The listener could feel that the songs are not measured alignments of social teachings, but spontaneous versions from the fountain of a pure maiden's heart who fell in love with the Divine. Alike the melodies of a nightingale, these songs always delight the listeners with their natural sweetness. They conquer the world with pure love. Humanity in its finest forms, found expressions in her songs. After suffering many adversities from her husband's family like mockery, disgrace, abuse and domestic torture, and the defamation by a

conventional society and its 'created' rules, she begs to her lover asking Him to protect her from these hardships. Mira sings:

Do not go off and abandon me, My Lord,

Weak woman as I am

Giridhara is my strength

He is my Master.

I am quite without merit

While Giridhara possesses every virtue...

I place my ruined life

In the shadow of Your protection,

Where else could I go, O King of Braj?

Mira recognizes no other Master,

Now spare her from further ignominy. (Alston 54)

In the above song Mirabai is begging for the shelter from her lover (Krishna). Her love here is selfless and extreme. Krishna here is not only her lover of her dreams, but the saviour of her realities. She happily climbs the ladder of eternal love, by asking grace and protection from her lover. For a devotee, the eternal love never sprouts on a single day or a single moment, rather it happens by several stages of slow evolution. At this stage, Mirabai gets scoffed and scorned by the conventional society around her and she requires helping hands of her beloved. She might have sung this song in state of deep anguish and it might be composed after she left her husband's home. The significant point to be noted here, is that she never begs to any other man for protection but calls only her eternal lover. This signifies the depth of her love and the faith she has in Him. She declares, "Mira recognizes no other Master" (Alston 54). This whole dependency and submission to her lover indicates her *ananya bhakti* or exclusive devotion to Lord

Krishna, which underscores True Love. This pure form of love develops and blooms to an obedient and modest form, where all requests and difficulties of her are abandoned. Mira later sings, “My mind is fixed on Giridhara/ And cares not for the insults of the world (Alston 46).

Several disgraces imposed on Mira worked to strengthen her aloofness and dispassion towards the material world. In such a sense, the miseries, grief, disdain and such sorrows later became boons to the devotees. This led them to realise that true happiness and ecstasy of life cannot be found in the material world and in worldly relationships. The illusory nature of the indecisive and fleeting world naturally brings the mind of a devotee like Mira towards the Lord in quest of the real self, the basis of eternal delight. The marks of her external renunciation turn out to be obvious in the songs of Mirabai. In one of her lyrics she sings:

I have taken off all gems and pearls
And donned the yogi’s beads.
Neither food nor house please me,
The Beloved has driven me mad. (Alston 67)

The final line of the above stanza pictures the passion of her love for her lover, Krishna. When the raging fire of such yearnings overwhelms the heart of a devotee, nothing else can gratify the devotee. Attraction to all the material life stops for ever. It might be like a thirsty man who is being offered a crystal palace full of jewelleries, instead of a glass of water. The man rejects all these fineries and asks for water. With this similar note of urgency that stalks from deep love and affection towards the Lord, Mira declares that her beloved lover has driven her ‘mad’. Renunciation becomes a fruit on the tree of such passionate yearning. When the devotee possess ultimate faith and extreme love for lord, *abhayahasta*, or the hands of protection will always be there for the devotee. When we

trace the life history of Mira from the available data, myths and legends, this statement is found correct. She has miraculously survived several times from several hardships. She kept singing her lover's songs and nothing could stop her intense love towards Him.

God is not a super power who is seated on the golden throne of Heaven, but he lives in the heart of every human. When a devotee like Mira distinguishes this truth by herself, she could easily sing, "My Beloved rests ever in my heart" (Alston 42), obviously, making it clear that God dwells in every human irrespective of caste or creed, male or female. This universal recognition makes human to love, respect and serve God by loving, respecting and serving every people around him. If man is capable of seeing and realising the existence of God in him, then the devotee becomes the perfect servant of God. This is the supreme stage of devotion. Mirabai voices for this in her songs.

Unlike her contemporary poets, Mira never negates her personal feelings and emotions, instead she finds clear space in her verses to express her personal desires. She never denies the mortal world. She employed imageries and metaphors drawn from the earthly world. Various elements of Mother Nature, rivers, trees, birds, animals, earth, sky, clouds, flowers, castles, forests and so on found space in her songs. She portrayed the characteristic features of European romantic poets. She never turned blind against her mundane surroundings, rather, she draws inspiration for her songs from the rich nature. Her eternal love cravings towards her lover find expression in her lyrics by blending her emotions with natural imageries. Mira sings:

Over the trees

a crescent moon glides

The Dark one has gone to dwell in Mathura

Me, I struggle, caught in the love noose

and yes,

Mira's lord can lift mountains

but today his passion

seems distant and faint. (Schelling 170)

The entire song portrays the grief and pain she feels in the separation from her lover. These lyrics of separation resemble that of Andal, who also longed for her Beloved lover. Mira strongly declares that she is caught in the noose of love. But on the last line, it is evident that she feels she lost him. Her lord has gone to Mathura, his native place. All along the night she craves for him. Her intense longing is portrayed in the lyrics. Mira expresses her passionate feelings and desires to join with her lover as soon as possible. She hurts when he avoids her. The pain of a true lover is expressed here. The song opens with natural images of a moonlight night, trees and crescent moon.

Madhav Hada in his book *Meera v/s Meera: Devoted Saint Poet or Determined Queen?* mentions that many of India's mystic poets and saints had never expressed their bodily passions or carnal desires. Those poets always tried to promote the repression of such personal feelings in poetry. Gradually, it later became an unstated rule that the appetites of the human physical body and its physical senses are to be covered and only the abnegation of such feelings, comforts and pleasures would help to attain ultimate salvation (164). But, the songs of Mira contained deep love, passion and soulful devotion towards her beloved. Her verses prove that she wants to contemplate on Lord Krishna forever. Her entire life itself is a quest for Him. She is not detached from the physical pleasures that please material life. Hada points out, "A subdued shade of sensuous and physical impulses can be felt throughout her gamut of poetry". (Hada 165) Mira never tends to outdo her individual longings, but intensely accepts them. Her songs

prove that she had those inhibitions of a woman and freely developed passionate and vigorous feelings towards her Beloved lover. Mira sings:

Who would believe my story?
 That a lover
 bit my hand like a snake,
 and the venom bursts through
 and I'm dying. (Schelling 173)

The above lyrics portray the strength of love, she herself has submitted to her lover. His love bit her like the venom of a serpent. She is dying out of love. She wants her divine lover to take her with Him and dreams of the eternal unification. The lyrics, in a way rejoices in the expression of her passionate love. Her unbridled joys find expression in her verses. The bite of the snake and its venom justifies the depth of her relation with her lover and the love they mutually shares. The lyrics justifies that her passionate lover had marked his love on her. Therefore, Mira is happy to express her relationship before the world. She is not detached from the personal feelings of a woman. She used the same concept of venom in her another verse too. Mira sings:

lightning flashes
 in the dark
 scared
 I want him
 the wind is
 cool and musical
 the clouds
 are pouring rain
 where are you

Hari
your absence
is venom
in my veins. (Soni 16)

Mira uses venom as a strong metaphor to manifest her passionate love. In the above lines too Mira is in want of her lover. She intensely yearns for Him. In the first poem, venom is his love. In the second song, it is his absence. This suggests that the pain she feels at his absence is as equal as the joy she celebrates when he is with her.

Sister, the Dark One won't speak to me.
Why does this useless body keep breathing?
Another night gone
and no one's lifted my gown.
He won't speak to me.
Years pass, not a gesture.
They told me
he'd come when the rains came,
but lightning pierces the clouds,
the clock ticks until daybreak
and I feel the old dread.
Slave to the Dark One,
Mira's whole life is a long
night of craving. (Schelling 165)

In the above song, Mira is feeling the grief of separation. The Dark One here is Lord Krishna. She complains to her friend, that her lover is not speaking with her. Also, Mira feels completely lost and she even thinks there is no use of breath if he is not with her.

She has submitted herself to her lover. She cannot bear the pain of avoidance or separation from his part. Krishna is someone who is associated with rain. He was the saviour of his land when huge rain attacked them. He lifted up the mountain and saved entire Gokula. Now, such a saviour cannot come to relief Mira's pain. Like, the lightning that pierces the dark clouds pain pierces and breaks her heart. The pain of love is too hard to bear for a sensuous devotee like Mira. The night passes and now its dawn again. But the lover hasn't arrived. Mira declares herself as a submissive slave to her lord. She tells him that she is a slave to him, and hence he must embrace her. The whole life of Mira moves on like a dark long night of intense craving. Mira directly portrays her sexual feelings in her lyrics. She wants her lover to join with her. In her another song, she demands Krishna, "Dark One, take this girl for your servant/ Then cut the cords and/ set her free" (Schelling 167).

Mira strongly believes that when her lord accepts her as his obedient servant, then she is set free from all the chains of her material life. This suggests that the ultimate submission to the lord with supreme devotion and love could free human from their worldly sorrows, miseries or difficulties. This is the peak stage of devotion. The devotee reaches the stage of extreme bliss and ecstasy at this point. The quest of her inner soul ended when she attained ultimate liberation by her union with the flute player at 1578, in Dwaraka. Her desire was fulfilled when her lover cut the cords and set her free. (Ramana 105) Through pure love and devotion a devotee could attain salvation. The power of love is so hard that it can transform physical world to metaphysical stage. Mira sings:

You pressed Mira's seal of love
 then walked out
 Unable to see you

she's hopeless
 tossing in bed-gasping her life out.
 Dark One, it's your fault-
 I'll join the yoginis,
 I'll take a blade to my throat in Banaras
 Mira gave herself to you,
 You touched her intimate seal
 and then left. (Schelling 168)

The devotion towards God is not only an intense form of love towards Him, but also a fine form of expressing emotions of a pure mind. It is a feeling of heart, not intellect. The true love of God makes an ardent devotee lose themselves and fall for Him. Here, Mira's unwavering love and passion towards her lord gave her the strength to cross the barriers of her material life. Her dedication towards her lover is more vibrant as well as complete. In the last part of the lyric, she declares that she gave herself to her lord Giridhar. Now, she became his obedient servant. Therefore she never bothers about any disgraces or scorns against her. God to Mira, is an embodiment of infinity. In the above stanza she declares that God has marked his seal of love on her. This seal makes her his woman of love. Even though, she is in the edge of grief and separation she wishes for a ray of hope. In other words, she tells her lover that, if he doesn't arrive she will join with the mystic women or end her life at Banaras. She tells that she is truthful and conscious in her love towards Him. But still, for some reasons, he left her. The pain out of separation ties her intensely. Being a mad lover, she waits for Him. Mira's love towards Krishna is selfless. He is her lover, friend, protector, saviour and Supreme Being. She has reached into a stage of illusion. Her soul yearns for a physical and spiritual unification with her lord. Her reason of existence is Lord Krishna (Ramana 102-103).

No sense of insecurity is found in Mira's verses. Her object of true love is Lord Krishna. The confidence she has in her lover finds expression in her lyrics. She sings, "Mira's Lord is Hari, the Indestructible/ To Him would she sacrifice her life" (Alston 35).

All along her mystic life, Mira remained fearless against the slurs and slanders against her. She possessed the charm of her eternal lover who is imperishable. The strength of her songs lies in its one-pointedness, and absolute surrender towards her lover. She continuously declares that she has no other except her Krishna. Her lover is more than all her other familial relations. Mira states that there is no expected return for pure love. She had surrendered wholly to her lover. She sings about her lover, "If He sold me into slavery, /I would acquiesce" (Alston 41). This exposes the supremacy of pure devotion of an ardent devotee. If such an overwhelming love exists, then all defamations become a matter of insignificance.

Mira's use of simple language clearly defines her spiritual integrity and transparency. Love is expressed in its most simplest and direct forms. She was influenced by the distinctive culture of her land and the linguistic beauty it possess. Mira used several signs and metaphors relating to the feminine body and its adornments. Like Andal, Akka Mahadevi and Lal Ded, physical body was her significant tool of expressing her Self. She sings:

The Dark One's love-stain
 is on her.
 other ornaments
 Mira sees a mere glitter
 A mark on her forehead,
 a bracelet, some prayer beads,

beyond that she wears only
her conduct. (Schelling 171)

Her code of conduct is her expression of love. The stain of love is on her body. Her lover had marked it. She happily accepts this stain as the best ornament she could have. The stain might be on her forehead. Hence, she feels that the stain merely glitters. The bracelet and the prayer beads in her hand marks the adornment of Mira. It is not the outside fancies, but the truth and love inside human heart that is the best adornment for a body. Mira is rich with her love, dedication, truthfulness and obedience towards her lover, her Beloved. The stain of love on her body is her most favourite ornament. The imageries related to feminine body is employed in the above lines. The language employed is humble and straight. The intensity of her liberal love is expressed in its fullest forms. Mira continues:

She might not distinguish
Splendour from filth
But she'd tasted the nectar of passion.
Might not know any Veda,
But a chariot swept her away.

Now she frolics in heaven, passionately bound to her god. (Schelling 172)

Mira declares that she had tasted the sweetness and warmth of passion. She has not studied Vedas. Still her lord's chariot sweeps her away. Now she reached in ecstasy; at heaven. There, she is unified with her lord. Her soul was seeking the soul of her lover. No earthly pleasure could satisfy her passion of love. Her thirst for love ends with the unification with her lord. Lord Krishna personifies the soul of the universe. Her devotion is single-minded. She wished to transcend herself to the imperishable world of her lover. This world is devoid of worries, sorrows, miseries, death and filled with pure selfless

love. Her way of love takes the form of a bride who longs for her groom. The chariot mentioned in the above lines might be the chariot of her dreams where she joins hands with her lover and moves forward happily. This indicates her wedding ride with her groom.

Mira sometimes uses the theme of reproach in her songs. This is at the time when her lover breaks his promises and makes her sad. This reproach feeling develops as a part of intense love and longing for lover. Mira sings:

I gave
my body
my life
my every
precious thing
now show yourself
you promised me
in another life. (Soni 90)

Mira feels annoyed when her lover is not with her. She reminds Him of his promise. She already submitted herself to her lover. Now the time has arrived to take her with Him. It is at this time she feels betrayed as he is not appearing before her and breaks his promise. At times, she becomes lunatic with her love. She sings:

I dance
wearing
ankle-bells

people say

I'm mad

mother-in-law says

the ruin

of our clan

Rana

sent me poison

I drank it

and laughed

offered

body and soul

for one look

at you

Giridhar

my master

now let me come

to you. (Soni 96)

In the above lyrics, a dancing image of Mira is seen. She wears hers jingling anklets and dances in joy. The world says she is mad. Mira is a mad lover. She dances when she is in the state of ecstasy, overwhelmed by joy. She drunk the poison that Rana offered her

and laughed. No poison can harm her, she belongs to Giridhar. Her beloved lover is her eternal saviour. The protecting hands of her lover saves her. Mira had already offered her body and soul for her lover. She is ready to join her Self with her lover. She asks his permission to join with him. An image of a woman driven mad with love is depicted here. Mira herself states she is mad with love. Mother-in-law symbolizes the conventional society around her. Those people may laugh at her and disgrace her as the one who ruins their clan. But these disdains does not bother the lover in Mira. The lunatic girl in her is engulfed in ecstasy. Sometimes Mira herself represents Radha-the eternal lover of Krishna. Devotion is not something that cuddle the feeble and the fickle who dance to the songs of erratic bodily desires. Lord bestows his grace to the genuine, committed and enthusiastic devotee.

The singing and dancing of an ardent devotee is a genuine manifestation of his or her internal bliss. At this stage, wholly immersed in the Divine by the passion of yearning in thought (might be the thought about the beautiful form of Divine), expression (singing about the glorifying deeds and plays of God) and action (dancing for the Divine), failing to recall all worldly interruptions that takes place naturally. From the day of birth every human is bound by consciousness about body, however to practice the stage of extreme ecstasy, this has to be transcended. *Sankirtans* or hymns where people sing the God's name with pure love and dance according to the beats of the sacred music with dedication, assist this transcendence of body consciousness, at least for the time being. The occasional chanting of the hymns with attention and recklessness can effect in giving heavenly delight to a normal soul. One can only imagine the intensity of ecstasy or bliss Mira must had experienced, who always whispered the name of her one can only imagine the bliss that a devotee like Mirabai experienced, she who literally breathed the name of her lover, Lord Krishna. The existence of such an ardent devotee

turn into a place of pilgrimage as the God's existence becomes exhibited by their passionate dedication. She continues:

only Giridhar

is mine

no one else

no one else

I've hunted

The world over. (Soni 113)

In these lines Mira makes it clearer that she longs for her Giridhar. He belongs to Mira. God is the lover here. Mira watered the tree of love with her tears of separation and kept the essence of true love in her safe. In one of her lyrics, Mira employs God as a businessman.

She sings:

our love

is ancient

I can't stay away

I'll sit

where he says

let him sell me

if he wants

he is my master

I'll let him do

Anything. (Soni 182)

In the above verse, Mira says that they fell in love during ancient days, so their love is deep rooted. Nothing can separate them. She cannot stay away from him long. Being a submissive partner, driven by mad love she agrees to whatever her lover asks. Mira says if he want to sell her, then let him sell. Her lover is her only master. She has no complaints in her lover's decisions. She leaves everything to Him.

The songs of Mira are a testament to the honest passion and gravity of her intense devotion. Even today, when these songs are sung or listened to, they fascinate the emotions of the listeners and uplift them to a diverse level. A deep listener is taken into the world of Mira and understands her dancing in divine wildness; no worries could attacks the mind of the one who listens to them with a genuine open heart. Her melodies are in themselves a declaration that God is Love and Love is eternal. In devotion, the common denominator is the love for God. When the love towards him is honest and aims at the Infinite, in a form or formless aspect, then there lies no place for any difference. When the body, mind and senses are drenched in pure love towards the Divine, they are destroyed, cleansed, and then the whole thing is perceived as the Divine; love dwells in the complete existence of the devotee.