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Ecospiritual Refusals: Ontological Resistance and Decolonial Memory in Kashmiri Mystical Verse♣

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Abstract

Modernity's ecological crises arise from deeper epistemic ruptures—chief among them, the disavowal of relational ontologies embedded in indigenous and non-Western cosmologies. These frameworks, often erased, articulate the world not as inert matter but as a field of sacred immanence, where knowledge is inseparable from being. Within this context, the poetry of Nund Rishi and Lal Ded—rooted in Kashmir's mystical tradition—offers a sustained intervention. Emerging from Islamic Sufism and Kashmiri Shaivism, their respective invocations of Wahdat al-Wujūd and Pratyabhijñā constitute a non-dual metaphysics that resists colonial modernity's ontological separations: between human and nonhuman, spirit and matter, self and world. Their verses call forth an ethics rooted in restraint, remembrance, and inner discipline—forms of ecological attention irreducible to managerial or instrumental paradigms.

Rather than treating mysticism as retreat, this paper reads their poetics as decolonial acts of world-making. In recovering sacred relation as the ground of ethical life, Nund Rishi and Lal Ded offer not only spiritual insight but a philosophical resource for reimagining ecology, responsibility, and being otherwise. Their poetry invites a reconsideration of how ethical presence emerges—not through mastery or intervention, but through attunement, humility, and a deepened sense of participation in the more-than-human order of being.

Keywords: Decolonial Ecology, Eco-spirituality, Sacred Immanence, Relational Ontology, Kashmiri Mysticism

Introduction

The twenty-first century bears witness to an escalating ecological crisis. Scientific assessments, such as those by IPCC, caution that the planet is nearing a critical threshold, with global temperatures projected to rise above the tipping point of 1.5°C as early as 2030 – portending intensified climate disruptions, biodiversity collapse, and resource scarcity (IPCC, 2023). These crises are not isolated anomalies but symptoms of the Anthropocene—a geologic epoch shaped by human hegemony over the Earth's systems (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). Critics, however, increasingly contend that the root of planetary degradation is not only the Anthropocene but the Capitalocene – capitalism's systemic commodification of life (Moore, 2016). This extractivist logic is metaphysical as much as material, sustained by ontological divides between nature and culture, earth and spirit etc.

In response, the humanities have begun to reimagine their role, with ecocriticism emerging as a crucial interdisciplinary mode of inquiry interrogating how cultural texts mediate and mythologize the natural world. (Garrard, 2012). As Chakrabarty (2021) contends, the

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Anthropocene unsettles the Cartesian dualism, compelling a reconfiguration of agency, ethics, and historical scale. Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" (2013) further destabilizes notions of human centrality and control. Yet these interventions often marginalize non-Western ontologies, particularly those grounded in spiritual and cosmological traditions (Nixon, 2011). This epistemic lacuna underscores the need to engage ecotheology—an interdisciplinary field exploring the faith, ecology, and responsibility—as a means of decolonizing ecological discourse (Jenkins & Bauman, 2022). As Tuck and Yang (2012) note, decolonization demands recovery of ontologies erased by colonialism's epistemicide.

At the heart of this ecotheological turn lies a deeper insight: the ecological crisis is not merely a technological or policy failure; it is a crisis of worldview—a severance from the sacred ground of being. In response, ecospirituality has emerged as an ontological and ethical counterpoint to secular-materialist frameworks dominating ecological discourse. As Bron Taylor (2001) argues, contemporary ecological resistance often takes the form of spiritual protest. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1996) has long asserted that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a crisis of the soul, rooted in the desacralization of the cosmos. Bridging theology and ecological ethics, ecospirituality positions the Earth not as resource but as revelation—a text to be approached with humility, awe, and responsibility (Foltz, 2003; Tucker and Grim, 2001). While ecotheological discourse often centers on Abrahamic traditions, this study foregrounds non-dual metaphysical traditions within Islamic Sufism and Kashmiri Shaivism as two distinct yet convergent ecospiritual lineages. These traditions, marginalized by colonial modernity's epistemicide (Santos 2008), offer not only ecological ethics but decolonial resistance, restoring pluriversal epistemologies that bridge spirituality and ecology.

In this paper, the cosmological vision of *Wahdat al-Wujūd,* developed by Ibn Arabi and echoed in the Kashmiri Sufi mystic Nund Rishi, is placed in dialogue with the *Pratyabhijñā* school of Kashmiri Shaivism, whose philosophical grammar undergirds the mystical utterances of Lal Ded. Though they emerge from distinct theological traditions, they converge in their non-hierarchical, participatory cosmologies that dismantle the ontological scaffolding of colonial modernity.

In *Wahdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Being), the cosmos is a theophanic field wherein all entities—animate and inanimate—are manifestations of the Divine Reality. The concept of *tajalli* (divine manifestation) posits that every phenomenon in the cosmos is a locus of divine self-disclosure (Chittick, 1989). This metaphysical inclusivity collapses hierarchical dualisms between subject and object, sacred and profane, spirit and matter. Similarly, *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy posits that the universe is a dynamic unfolding of *Paramaśiva*, the supreme consciousness. As articulated by Utpaladeva and systematized by Abhinavagupta, the Absolute is not static Being but reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*), manifesting through the pulsating energy of *śakti* (*spanda*). The world is not an illusion (*māyā)*, but a real expression of divine freedom (*svātantrya*), and liberation consists not in transcendence but in recognition (*pratyabhijñā*)—the realization that the self is already divine (Dyczkowski, 1987; Singh, 2008).

This vision grounds ethical responsibility. The Qur'anic concept of *Khilāfah* (vicegerency) frames humans not as owners of the Earth but as stewards entrusted with its care (Qur'an 2:30). The Earth, as *amānah* (trust), demands protection and reverence. Fazlun Khalid (2004) notes that *khilāfah* entails spiritual accountability, where ecological harm reflects *ghaflah* (forgetfulness)—a rupture in the divine-human-nature relationship. Virtues such as *zuhd* (restraint), *taqwā* (God-consciousness), and *tawakkul* (trust) thus become ecological disciplines, resisting accumulation and domination (Khalid 2019). In Kashmiri Shaivism, ethical agency is grounded through *pratyabhijñā*: the realization that the self is non-separate from the divine. This leads to dissolution of egoic will and a spontaneous alignment with *dharma*—not as social duty, but as participation in cosmic harmony. Practices such as non-

attachment (*vairāgya*), discipline (*yama*), and discernment (*viveka*) are not moralistic impositions but reflections of an awakened subjectivity (Baumer 2002; Muller-Ortega 1989).
This framework becomes essential for understanding the eco-metaphysical imagination of Nund Rishi and Lal Ded. Where Nund Rishi affirms that "The One There is the One Here," collapsing transactional binaries, Lal Ded proclaims "I am nothing; He is everything," enacting the *Pratyabhijñā* principle that *aham* (I-ness) dissolves into the luminous consciousness of *Śiva*.
In placing these ontologies side by side, this paper does not seek to homogenize them, but to illuminate their convergent ethical horizon. Both frame the world as alive, intentional, and permeated with sacred value. Both treat self-transformation as inseparable from cosmological insight. And both posit that to care for the Earth is to remember (*dhikr / smṛti*) its divine origin and structure.

Nund Rishi and Lal Ded: Sacred Ontologies and Poetic Worldmaking

After delineating the convergent ontologies of Sufism and Shaivism, this study now turns to their expression in indigenous Kashmiri verse. In the *shruks* of Nund Rishi and the *vakhs* of Lal Ded, these poet-saints do more than merely articulate a non-dual metaphysics: they embody it.

Ecospiritual Poetics: Analysis of Nund Rishi's Verses

Nund Rishi's verses articulate a radical vision of ecological unity that both predates and subverts modern epistemologies of mastery and exploitation. His thought stages a profound intervention against anthropocentric hierarchies, capitalist materialism, and spiritual amnesia of modernity.

"Thou art the butcher, thou the slaughtering blade;
Thou art the vendor, thou the customer too.
The One There, is the One Here;
Omnipresent, He occupies all space;
The pedestrian and the charioteer are one,
The invisible He, behind the scenes." (Parimoo 19)

The verse epitomizes the doctrine of *Wahdat ul Wujūd*, wherein multiplicity is but a contingent manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Absolute. By collapsing dualities - butcher/blade, vendor/customer - Nund Rishi negates the ontological separation between actor and act, subject and object, echoing the Qur'anic assertion that "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden" (Qur'an 57:3). This non-dual metaphysics destabilizes anthropocentric hierarchies, positing all entities as *mazahir* of the Absolute (Chittick, 1989).
"The One There, is the One Here" underscores Qur'anic dialectic of transcendence (*tanzih*) and immanence (*tashbih*), where the Divine is simultaneously beyond creation (*munazzah*) and intimately present within it (*mushabbah*). For Ibn Arabi, transcendence ensures God's ineffability and omnipresence: "wherever you turn, there is the Face of God" (Chittick, 1989, Qur'an 2:115). As Odin explains, this unity manifests in creation's multiplicity, where "things in the cosmos appear in a variety of forms and shapes, but eventually all individual forms… dissolve into their non-existent status in the all-encompassing knowledge of God" (Odin 29). Such metaphysics subverts Cartesian dualism, anticipating modern critiques of human exceptionalism (Plumwood, 1993).
Though the verse lacks explicit ecological imagery, it universalizes *Tajalli* (divine manifestation), sacralizing the mundane as *ayat* (signs) of the Divine (Chittick, 1989). This vision aligns with Parimoo's account of Nund Rishi's epistemology, which emerged not from scholastic training but from his engagement with "eight things in Nature" – sky, earth, sun and wind – that "led him to… Divine unity" (Parimoo 34). By framing nature as an animate teacher, Nund Rishi's monism subverts colonial commodification of nature and destabilizes the epistemic foundations of colonial modernity. The verse's dissolution of agential binaries critiques instrumentalist anthropocentrism. If the Divine is the "butcher", "vendor", and

"customer", human claims to dominion over nature are ontologically void. Parimoo (1978) situates this democratization within Nund Rishi's biographical resistance to dualism: his refusal to study beyond the letter *Aliph* (ا) – symbolizing divine unity – to avoid "distraction from the thought of the One Almighty-God" (Parimoo 88).

The verse's vernacular poetics resist the epistemic violence of colonial modernity. British colonial projects, as Gadgil and Guha (1993) document, commodified forests (The Forest Act of 1865) and fragmented Indigenous cosmologies. Nund Rishi's sacralization of transactional roles, grounded in Parimoo's (1988) account of nature as his "first teacher" (Parimoo 86), subverts the Capitalocene's extractivist logic, which reduces nature to "standing reserve" (Heidegger, 1954). His non-dual ontology aligns with Mignolo's (2011) "border thinking," reclaiming epistemologies erased by coloniality. Furthermore, the "butcher/blade" metaphor critiques the neoliberal commodification of life, paralleling Mbembe's (2019) necropolitical analysis of extractivism, where capitalism decides "who may live and who must die." Nund Rishi's verse implicates both as manifestations of the Real, urging a reckoning with the sacredness of all life.

"Man was created with natural qualities
(Of) Water, air, fire and earth:
Born from the womb of his mother,
Infatuated got he with the world.
When his body decays with adverse winds.
From dust he sprang, to dust will return." (Parimoo 35)

Having situated the Divine within all relationality, Nund Rishi deconstructs human exceptionality. The opening lines frame the human as a composite of the four classical elements—water, air, fire, and earth. This elemental ontology challenges any dualism that elevates humanity above the natural world. Drawing on Qur'anic imagery of human origin (Qur'an 23:12–14), Nund Rishi reworks the idea of creation from clay into a vision of ecological anthropology, one that emphasizes interconnectedness and rejects hierarchies. His *shruks* repeatedly return to this elemental identity, not as a mark of limitation but as the very ground of transformation. As Bazaz notes—"Only clay here and only clay there/turn this desert into a flower garden" (Bazaz 199)—the human, though dust, can bloom into divine realization. The refrain: "from dust he sprang, to dust will return" affirms the cyclical truth of existence, emphasizing humility, relationality, and the sacredness of the elemental self.

This cosmological vision is illuminated further by Odin's reading of Ibn al-ʿArabī: "While humans represent the undifferentiated Unity of names or attributes as the microcosm, the cosmos, as the macrocosm, is the differentiated manifestation of God's attributes and each reflects the other" (Odin 33). Nund Rishi's thought reflects this logic: the human is meaningful only within the greater symphony of being. Bazaz notes that Nund Rishi often invokes '*amal*—action or practice—and links ontology with ethics by stressing human accountability (Bazaz 61). As Odin writes, "The more a society is composed of human beings aspiring toward noble, divine traits, the greater the chance of the cosmos and things in the cosmos evolving into a better state" (Odin 33). In this way, ethical self-cultivation becomes not only a spiritual imperative but an ecological one.

At the heart of this vision is a critique of modernity's metaphysical arrogance. Nund Rishi exposes the absurdity of capitalist and anthropocentric worldviews: that which is made of earth cannot claim mastery over earth without enacting its own destruction. Forgetting this truth—*ghaflah*—leads to spiritual alienation and ecological violence, severing the human from its origin in dust.

"My Ego is an Elephant run amuck.
Me has he trampled under his heavy foot;
You may feed him on broth, again and again.
Full of pranks is the captivating animal!

Out of a thousand, hardly one escapes,
Otherwise, all have been crushed by him." (Parimoo 72)

Having articulated human fragility, Nund Rishi diagnoses the metaphysical pathology that drives both spiritual decay and ecological catastrophe: the unrestrained ego (*nafs*). In Sufi metaphysics, the *nafs* is often figured as an untamed beast requiring *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification). Here, the ego appears as an elephant "run amuck," whose "heavy foot" tramples the self into submission. "You may feed him on broth…," the poet warns, yet its appetite remains insatiable. This image evokes the endlessly fed consumer ego of modernity—indulged but never satisfied. Its seemingly playful "pranks" conceal a deeper violence: it deceives, dominates, and devours.

Bazaz underscores the Sufi framing of this danger, writing: "The word *nafs* in Nund Rishi… is used more in the Sufi sense as a blameworthy ego that must be brought under control" (Bazaz 206). In this light, the elephant is not just a metaphor but a moral and metaphysical crisis. Bazaz links the verse to a broader mystical imagination: "Nund Rishi subjects the experience of the *nafs* to a radical doubt and calls for a dying of this 'ego-self' for a more enduring life… The *nafs* here recalls the mad elephant that charged at the Buddha with murderous intent but then suddenly became calm and kneeled before him. The task of the ascetic is to tame the mad, elephantine *nafs*" (Bazaz 207).

The poet's despair is real. "My ego destroyed me," one verse confesses. "It hides even now in the shadows/If I could only get hold of it awhile/I would put a sword through its neck" (Bazaz 221). This violent self-talk is not nihilistic, but revelatory: it registers the severity of the inner crisis. The *nafs* destroys not only the self's spiritual potential but its capacity for relationship—with God, with others, with the world. This aligns with Bazaz's framing of Nund Rishi's negative theology as ontological resistance: "Be it the severe and relentless questioning of the *nafs*... or the questioning of Being itself, negative theology… is an existential understanding… of human existence" (Bazaz 206).

The ego's trampling of the self is not an isolated mystical lament, but the archetype of all tramplings - spiritual, political, ecological. "Out of a thousand, hardly one escapes" the poet writes, capturing the rarity of spiritual awakening and the depth of systemic capture. To escape is not merely to retreat—it is to remember, to return to a divine order where human life aligns with sacred ecology.

"Thanks be to the fire-pot and the rags I wear
Which protected me from cold in winter months.
Staying here do I deem a great blessing.
And salted '*sadarkanz*' keeps off the wolf of hunger;
What care I for sweets and sugar-candy?
Dandelion and 'hakh' taste sweet as white honey.
May God imbue my heart with His grace.
So may the servant be saved from disgrace" (Parimoo 60)

Against the ambitions of the ego and its violent consumption, Nund Rishi proposes a counter-economy of sufficiency, humility, and gratitude. The imagery of rags, salted bread, wild-greens devalues luxury and revalorizes indigenous sustenance. The fire-pot becomes a site of sacred gratitude, while sugar-candy—a symbol of luxury and colonial extraction (Shiva, 1988)—is dismissed as superfluous.

This ascetic minimalism is not a posture of deprivation but a pathway to *Sahaja*—a state of innate spiritual ease and harmony with the real. As Bazaz explains, *Sahaja* implies a spontaneous, natural state of being, untainted by ego or illusion (Bazaz, 2023). Nund Rishi's verse affirms this ethos: "The one who has found taste in wild vegetables/He is counted among the *Sahaja*" (Bazaz 111). Here, the taste for *hakh* and dandelion becomes a sign of mystical ripeness, not ascetic lack. Rather than aspiring to sweetness from afar, the poet finds it already present in the Earth's simplest gifts.

Bazaz further clarifies that Nund Rishi "connects *Sahaja* to a simple and ascetic lifestyle not indistinguishable from Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) insistence on *faqr,* or voluntary poverty" (Bazaz 111). The simplicity of the fire-pot and foraged greens thus becomes a mystical ethic, not merely a material condition. This aesthetic of sufficiency constitutes a decolonial ecology *avant la lettre*. Rather than viewing nature as raw material to be refined into luxuries, Nund Rishi affirms the Earth as already abundant, already sacred.

This aesthetic of sufficiency is grounded in a spiritual ethic of service (*Khidmah*). As Bazaz notes, for Nund Rishi a true Muslim "shares his food and resources with others and turns his back on anger, greed, attachment and pride... He never gets tempted by wealth" (Bazaz 59). The verse's embrace of dandelion and *hakh* over sweets expresses not a lack of means, but a deliberate rejection of the ego's craving for excess.

His prayer for divine grace—rather than material abundance—signifies a theological reordering of value itself: true wealth lies not in possession but in gratitude. Nund Rishi's asceticism prefigures decolonial ethics of subsistence, food sovereignty, and reverence for the local. To stay with the fire-pot and the dandelion is not to retreat into poverty but to inhabit a world where grace and gratitude redefine the very conditions of the good life.

Ontological Insights in Lal Ded's *Vakhs*

Lal Ded's verses emerge from the confluence of lived mysticism and the non-dual metaphysics of Kashmiri Shaivism. Her *vakhs* trace a journey from *vismriti* (forgetfulness) to *pratyabhijñā* (self-recognition), articulating a vision of consciousness as self-luminous and reflexive (*vimarśa*). Rejecting ritual orthodoxy in favor of direct experience, her poetics enact sacred immanence, where the self is a mode of the Absolute. Her voice affirms eco-spiritual presence rooted in humility, awareness, and reverence for the world.

"I gently lament for you.
Mind, you are in love with illusion.
Not a shadow of this worldly splendor
will accompany you.
Oh, why do you forget your real nature?" (Odin 7)

The opening lament describes a primordial state of spiritual exile: the mind's entanglement in *maya*, or illusion. The verse, as Odin explains, reflects Lal Ded's effort "to tear herself away from the comforts and pleasures of life by reminding herself of their transitory nature" (Odin 7). This illusion, understood in Vedantic and Kashmiri Shaiva philosophies as *tirodhana* (concealment), obscures the Self's authentic nature. In Kashmir *Shaiva* metaphysics, *maya* operates through the *kanchukas*—limitations that veil pure consciousness—producing multiplicity that obscures the unitary ground of *Paramashiva* (Wallis, 2012). The mind's infatuation with the phenomenal world (*samsara*) is not simply a moral weakness but an ontological dislocation, wherein the finite mistakes itself for autonomous substance.

Lal Ded's lament is deeply philosophical: she diagnoses the human condition as one of epistemic forgetfulness (vismriti). As Odin writes, "She finds herself adrift in the material world, where everything is subject to death... The 'mind-horse' needs to be brought under control to experience the higher Self" (Odin 7). Forgetting the "real nature"—the Self that transcends individual mind and body—is the fundamental ontological error that leads to spiritual bondage. As Lal Ded elsewhere declares: "Self-knowledge is to be dead to worldly things while still alive" (Odin 10). This epistemological blindness is not merely spiritual but ecological in its consequences. Val Plumwood's critique of "hyperseparation" maps onto Lal Ded's concern with the mind's alienation from the real. The modern illusion of separateness echoes the same delusion Lal Ded decries: "Only One I found in everyone—what is wrong with eating with anyone?" (Odin 11). Her sorrow is therefore not for moral failure alone but for the condition of misrecognition itself—the forgetting that sustains the illusion of separateness and

licenses dominion. As Odin summarizes, “For Lalla, acquiring knowledge and opening up to the divine consciousness is a living act, which requires inner transformation” (Odin, 11).

"Impurities of my mind were
wiped away as from a mirror,
and I attained self-knowledge.
I saw Him near me—
He is everything and
I am nothing." (Odin 8)

Lal Ded articulates the epistemological fruit of such purification: the attainment of *atma-jnana* (self-knowledge), wherein the illusory distinctions between self and other dissolve. The metaphor of mind as mirror—obscured by impurities and restored to clarity through ascetic refinement—belongs to both Kashmiri Shaiva and Sufi traditions. In the *Pratyabhijna* School, consciousness is inherently luminous (*prakāśa*), yet appears limited by *mala* (impurity) (Dyczkowski, 1987). The spiritual task is not to gain new knowledge, but to remove the veils that obscure one’s innate radiance.

Abir Bazaz notes that Lal’s poetry expresses the journey across the distance separating human and divine: “the union of the part and the whole which she extols” (Bazaz 157). The purified mirror signifies a soul that has traversed this distance, culminating in ego-dissolution and the unveiling of divine immanence. The realization that “He is everything and I am nothing” enacts an ontological reversal: multiplicity is not separation but the *svātantrya* (freedom) of *Paramashiva*. As Bazaz writes, “Lal searches for herself in the fields of Nothingness... and moves toward the inside from the outside" (Bazaz 158). Her mind becomes not just a reflection of the Divine, but a vessel through which it refracts into the world.

Her mystical vision directly challenges modern epistemologies that reduce the Earth to dead matter. Restoring the innate luminosity of consciousness, she gestures toward an ontology where beings are luminous expressions of the sacred Real. This resonates with contemporary eco-spiritual thought (e.g., Vaughan-Lee, 2016), which insists on reawakening to the sacredness of creation as a precondition for ecological healing. As Bazaz writes, quoting Lal, “my life spills over with the desire for home” (Bazaz 189), expressing not transcendence, but a reversal of Neoplatonic emanationism – where the *zu* (vital soul-force), seeks to sanctify the world from within through solitude and inner attunement. The desire for “home” becomes a spiritual return to immanence, a recovery of sacred relation rather than escape – an impulse that undergirds both mystical realization and ecological restoration.

In a world where colonial-modern metaphysics have erased the radiance of creation, Lal Ded’s realization, “He is everything and I am nothing”—reclaims a relational ontology that resists the objectification underlying ecological devastation. Her purified mirror thus becomes not just a symbol of inner clarity, but a cosmological act of resistance—restoring to the world its sacred face.

"Neither you nor I,
and neither meditation
nor the object of meditation exist.
The All-doer forgets Himself.
The blind find this meaningless.
The wise become one
with this supreme state." (Odin 8)

This verse aerticulates Lal Ded’s metaphysical consummation: the realization of radical non-duality (*advaya*). In asserting the nonexistence of subject ("you" or "I") and object ("meditation" and "object of meditation"), she negates the fundamental categories that structure phenomenal experience. This move parallels the highest teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism, particularly Abhinavagupta’s doctrine of *anuttara*—the ultimate reality that lies beyond all dualities and conceptual limitations, where even the triad of knower, known, and knowledge collapses into

a unified consciousness (Wallis, 2017). Hoskote reinforces this interpretation, noting that Lalla's poetry reflects "a radical transformation of consciousness aimed at recovering the identity of the self with the Divine" (Hoskote, 2011).

The line "The All-doer forgets Himself" introduces a theologically charged paradox. This echoes the doctrine of *tirodhana* (concealment), wherein *Paramashiva* voluntarily obscures unity to manifest multiplicity—an act of cosmic play (*lila*). Hoskote interprets such lines as expressive of the *Śaiva* view that the world is "not an illusion to be rejected but a creative expression of the Divine."

The phrase "The blind find this meaningless" underscores a spiritual epistemology privileging *prajñā*—direct intuitive knowledge—over conceptual or scriptural understanding. As Hoskote writes, Lalla "scoffs at the scholar who substitutes experience with scripture" and critiques those who "remain amnesiac towards [their] true nature" (Hoskote, 2011). The "blind" are not physically impaired but spiritually unreceptive, caught in the illusions of dualistic perception. In contrast, "the wise become one with this supreme state," expressing *jivanmukti,* or liberation-in-life—a core aspiration in Kashmir Shaivism.

This realization, Hoskote stresses, is not an abstract metaphysical idea but a lived, embodied state: "Lalla treats the body as the site of all her experiments in self-refinement... the symbolic and the sensuously palpable are not in opposition, but rather suffuse one another" (Hoskote, 2011). The dissolution of subject-object binaries, then, is not only philosophical but somatic and experiential. This embodied non-duality opposes ontologies of control and hierarchy, making Lalla's thought both spiritually transformative and politically subversive.

By dissolving distinctions, Lalla prefigures a decolonial metaphysics, one that dismantles the very foundations of domination—over self, others, and the more-than-human world. Her poetic ontology thus anticipates what Arturo Escobar calls "relational ontologies," which challenge modernity's obsession with separability.

"Kill your mortal enemies—
lust, anger, and desire.
Otherwise they would kill you
with their arrows.
Calm them with self-restraint
and good thoughts.
Recognize their nature
and their power." (Odin 9)

Having established the non-dual ontology, Lal Ded turns to the ethical praxis necessary for stabilizing such vision: the conquest of inner enemies. These enemies are not external forces but internal passions (*kleshas*)—lust, anger, and desire—which obscure the purity of consciousness and entangle the self in cyclic suffering (*samsara*) (Yoga Sutras II.3). Lal Ded's metaphor of arrows underscores the existential threat these passions pose: unchecked, they reassert the illusion of separative existence and re-anchor the self in the finite body-mind complex.

This ethical vision resonates with the Qur'anic insight that "the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil" (Qur'an 12:53). Lal Ded's *vakhs* express a similar emphasis on internal struggle, identifying the true enemies as "lust, anger and greed," which must be "slain" through self-restraint and discernment (Kaul, 1973). Her insistence on recognizing "their nature and their power" marks a path of lucid ethical vigilance. Mastery over these passions, for Lal Ded, requires not repression but *viveka* (discriminative awareness): a clear perception of desire's impermanence and its constructed hold on the self.

Abir Bazaz (2023) reinforces this view through a shared Sufi-Shaiva lens, noting that Lal Ded's ethical struggle is rooted in a direct confrontation with the passions—greed, lust, and pride—not as abstract vices, but as immediate psychological realities. He frames this as "a life-to-death struggle to find a Beloved" (Bazaz 156), underscoring the intensity of her inner discipline and

its spiritual stakes. This struggle is not a denial of life, but a refinement of it—a preparation for divine encounter. In this sense only a mind unclouded by turbulence can reflect the plenitude of Being.

Lal Ded's inner discipline also carries profound ecological implications. When projected outward, unchecked passions - especially desire - fuel extractive economies and environmental degradation. Her call for restraint anticipates critiques of the "imperial self" (Shiva, 1988), where ungoverned desire drives both personal suffering and planetary collapse. As Khan notes, her teachings embody an ethics of becoming, grounded in vigilance, restraint, and awareness (Khan, 1994). Bazaz echoes this, observing that "the revolutions of emotion intensify and confer on her ideas and thinking... the form of great poetry" (Bazaz 156)—poetry that emerges from struggle and returns to serve the world.

In this light, Lal Ded's verse proposes an alternative economy of desire: one rooted not in accumulation and indulgence but in clarity, relation, and reverence. The conquest of inner enemies is not a rejection of life, but a return to its sacred center—where restraint becomes the ground of insight, and discipline opens the self to communion with all life.

Conclusion

Through a sustained engagement with the verses of Nund Rishi and Lal Ded, this study has sought to excavate the profound philosophical, ecological, and decolonial visions embedded within Kashmiri mysticism. Despite their distinct theological lineages, both converge upon a radical dismantling of anthropocentric, dualistic, and proprietary modes of being. Their poetry, situated within indigenous epistemologies, offers spiritual guidance and an ontological critique of frameworks that have undergirded modernity's ecological and epistemic ruptures.

Nund Rishi's articulation of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) dissolves agent-object binaries, sacralizes the quotidian world as theophany (*tajalli*), and subverts the logic of extraction by reimagining all entities as manifestations of the Absolute. His ecosufi vision negates the colonial and capitalist metaphysics of possession, domination and extraction, calling instead for an ontology of relational reverence, humility, and sacred embeddedness within the cosmos. The humility demanded by Nund Rishi — through restraint, remembrance (*dhikr*), and spiritual poverty (*faqr*) — emerges as a necessary antidote to the metaphysical forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) that fuels both spiritual and ecological devastation.

Parallelly, Lal Ded's philosophical journey — from lament over forgetfulness to realization of non-duality — stages a no less rigorous critique. Her negation of external possessions challenges the conflation of worth with accumulation. Her ontology dismantles the partitions that colonialism would later exploit, affirming instead the omnipresence of the Self across all identities. Rooted in the non-dual Shaiva tradition, she articulates a metaphysics in which the Self (*Atman*) and the Absolute (*Paramashiva*) are immanently one. Her verses enact the dissolution of dualities — self and other, sacred and profane, subject and object — through an experiential realization of *prakasha* (pure consciousness) and *spanda* (vibrational dynamism). This vision destabilizes the metaphysical foundations of both colonial rationality and capitalist materialism, which reduce existence to transactional value. Her radical interiority affirms a world suffused with divine consciousness, where ethical action arises from ontological clarity, not institutional prescription.

Together, Nund Rishi and Lal Ded propose alternative imaginaries to capitalist and colonial structures that have devastated both the human soul and the Earth. Their insistence on the sacred interpenetration of beings, inner purification, and the illusoriness of possessive identity constitutes a metaphysical and ethical template for resisting modernity's violence. In recalling the sacred embeddedness of existence, their voices offer not an escape into mysticism, but a reclamation of the Earth as sacred territory — a reinhabitation of being where the Divine is intimately woven into every breath.

In an age of planetary crisis, their ecosufi and ecospiritual visions emerge not as artifacts but as urgent philosophical resources. Their verses invite us to remember — not nostalgically, but ontologically — the possibility of living within a cosmos that is neither a resource to be exploited nor a domain to be conquered, but a sacred unfolding of the Real, in which to participate with love.

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