

## THEORY OF REBIRTH

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### Abstract

*This short research paper discusses the theory of rebirth in relation to Shaivite yogini Lalleshwari, my research subject. According to the folk memory, she had been born in the lower species, i.e. animals, in her previous births. In her last birth, she was Lalleshwari who undertook the spiritual practice (yoga sadhana) which she learned from her most revered Guru, Siddha Shrikanth, and attained liberation (moksh).*

### INTRODUCTION

Around the fourteenth century, *siddha yogini* Lalleshwari accomplished the essence of Indian philosophy, i.e. attaining liberation (*moksh*). According to Indian philosophy, the human birth is the rarest gift because it is the only opportunity for an embodied soul (*jeevatma*) to shatter the ceaseless birth-and-death chain. That is to say, a human body is indispensable for undertaking spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*) and attaining liberation (*moksh*). (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2006) She faithfully believed in the words of her most revered Guru and the sacred scriptures. Therefore, she chose to dedicate her whole life to undertake spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*). In the end, she succeeded in attaining liberation (*moksh*) and made her human life fruitful. Regarding this matter, Lord Shiv says in the *Shiv Samhita* (2:49) that—

*The burden of carrying this physical body, the product of karma, becomes fruitful when it is utilized to attain moksh. Otherwise, the burden of carrying this physical body will always be barren.*

### TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL

Yogic theory mentions that the soul transmigrates from one life to the other in an unending succession. Life continues even if the body dies. That is to say, sooner or later the body will perish. However, the soul remains forever unborn and undying. It is reborn upon every physical death in a nonstop series of lifetimes.

*Ava-gaman* (coming and going) is the Sanskrit word to describe these perpetual cycles of birth and death which the soul undergoes. In the state of an embodied soul (*jeevatma*), the eternal soul (*atma*) seems to be dying and reincarnating because it is bound to the endlessly turning wheel of mundane existence (*samsar*).

Yogic theory also mentions that the purpose of human life is to shatter this endlessly turning wheel of mundane existence (*samsar*) or attain liberation (*moksh*). Although the soul continues to live after the death of the body, it certainly is not liberation. This survival after the death of the body is just a temporary respite from life on the earthly plane. The subconscious impressions (*samskars*) of the previous lifetimes continue to stick in the soul. These *samskars* will delineate the personality of a man in his next lifetime.

The law of *karma* or the metaphysical procedure of action and reaction is the foundation of the theory of rebirth. The conditions of the future lifetimes depend on the account of the past *karmas*. No one can escape the law of *karma*, i.e. as you sow, so will you reap. (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 1994) Here I shall briefly narrate the law of *karma* in regards to the theory of rebirth.

### REBIRTH THROUGH KARMA

The evolution of an embodied soul (*jeevatma*) is a very long journey. In the beginning, the *jeevatma* is clothed in a material body composed of five elements. The evolutionary power of *prakriti* (nature) motivates it to struggle for survival. Firstly, it is born as an amoeba. Secondly, it may be born as some vegetable form with a complex structure. Afterwards, it takes births in different lower species such as the insect, bird, reptile, mammal, etc. Step

by step, an embodied soul (*jeevatma*) transmigrates from one life to the next and takes births in the 8.4 million species (*yonis*) which the Creator Brahma has made. (Complier Sannyasini Yogini Maiya, 2018) Finally, it acquires a human birth. The speed of his evolution is extremely slow. Each lifetime the *jeevatma* is born in a somewhat higher species. Moreover, each lifetime he plays an interchangeable character role, such as hunter or hunted, weak or strong, mother or wife, ruler or subordinate, etc.

The level of consciousness of the *jeevatma* goes on increasing in the lengthy process of evolution. Gradually, his intellect, emotions and reasoning is developed. He learns hard lessons over innumerable lives and accumulates necessary experiences. Eventually, he gains the required qualities to attain liberation (*moksh*) and learns how to undertake spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*). In one blessed lifetime, he realizes his true identity as *atma*, or the divine essence of mankind which is identical to Brahm the Supreme Soul. That is to say, he transcends the natural elements (*prakriti*), becomes indestructible, and remains forever blissful. Simultaneously, he has shattered the wheel of mundane existence (*samsar*) or coming and going (*ava-gaman*). Thereafter, he does not have to undergo the painful process of birth, death, and rebirth anymore. (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2013)

### KARMA ALONE DETERMINES THE FATE

According to Indian philosophy, *karma* alone determines the species, circumstances, and situations of each bound soul (*jeevatma*) when he undergoes rebirths. Therefore, the past *karmas* which he performed in previous lives form the basis of his present life. If he utilizes the present life righteously, he would abandon the forbidden actions (*nishiddh karmas*) and focus on performing the prescribed actions (*vihit karmas*). In this way, his future birth will be in one of the heavens (*swargs*). Such a *jeevatma* ascends to heaven, enjoys the fruits of his past good *karmas*, and experiences tremendous happiness. Similarly, if he performs excessive forbidden actions (*nishiddh karmas*), it is certain that his future birth will be in one of the hells (*naraks*). Such a *jeevatma* must descend to hell, endure the fruits of his bad *karmas*, and suffer unbearable pain. (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2006-2013) Regarding this matter, Lord Shiv says in the *Shiv Samhita* (1:89) that—

*Karma clothes the jeevatma with a physical body. According to his past karmas, the soul takes birth from the annamay kosh (physical body) of his father. To the wise, this exquisite body is a punishment because it is created for the purpose of enduring the fruits of his past karmas.*

However, even if all of his *sanchit karmas* (past *karmas* which are yet to mature for undergoing the result or fruit) are squared up in heaven or hell, the *jeevatma* is not liberated. He must be reborn on earth. Why? Because without undertaking spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*), there is no liberation. In other words, he must obtain a human body for the reason that it is the only means to undertake *yoga sadhana*. With the blessings of God, the most fortunate *jeevatma* acquires a human body, receives the authentic guidance from a competent Guru, undertakes *yoga sadhana*, develops discrimination, and strengthens *pran* (vital air). He becomes eligible to attain the loftiest goal of human birth, i.e. liberation (*moksh*), if he persists in treading the spiritual path. (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2013) (Adi Sankaracharya)

### MAN CAN SHAPE HIS OWN FATE

Man is in a position to shape his own fate due to the power of his free will. Based on his free will, he can choose to perform the forbidden actions (*nishiddh karmas*) or the prescribed actions (*vihit karmas*). He can also choose to renounce the worldly life and undertake the spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*). The species lower than the human species do not possess the power of free will. Therefore, they cannot shape their own fate. Similarly, although the divine species are higher than human species, they also do not possess the power of free will. Therefore, they also cannot shape their own fate. This is why man can be influential and his ability of performing actions based on his free will is recognized in all the worlds. (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2006-2013)

### EXAMPLE: LALLESHWARI HAD BEEN BORN IN THE LOWER Species

There is an amazing folk memory or legend showing that Laleshwari remembered at least seven of her previous births. It is believed that in her first birth, she was a married woman who lived in Pandrenthan village. Some years passed before she conceived and delivered a baby boy. Her husband and other family members arranged a confinement ceremony for her. It was held eleven days after she delivered her baby boy. During the ceremony, she requested her family priest, Siddha Shrikanth, to answer her question.

“How am I related to my baby boy?” she inquired.

“He is your son, of course.” he answered.

“No, that’s wrong. If you wish to know the answer, please wait for one year and then visit Marhom village. In a few days, I will die

and I will take birth as a filly with certain recognizable marks in that village.”

She died shortly as she predicted. Out of curiosity, Siddha Shrikanth visited Marhom village after one year and found a filly with the described marks. He requested the filly to give him the answer. However, she said “If you wish to know the answer, wait for six months and then visit Vejibror village. I will die soon and then take birth as a pup with certain recognizable marks in that village.” Suddenly, a tiger sprang up from a nearby bush, leaped at the filly, killed her, and devoured her.

Now Siddha Shrikanth became more curious than ever. He visited Vejibror village after six months and found the pup with the described marks. He requested the pup to give him the answer. Once again, she replied that she will die soon and then take rebirth as some creature with certain recognizable marks. If he wishes to know the answer, please come to find her at some village after some period of time. When she finished her words, a pony ran towards the pup, trampled on her, and killed her. Subsequently, she took six births as animals.

In this way, he could never hear the answer from her for she repeatedly underwent similar fate. The situation perplexed him and he gave up the idea of hearing her answer. Therefore, he went to Wastarvan, a hill about fifteen miles from Srinagar, to perform austerity.

Meanwhile, she took her seventh birth at Pandrenthan village as a Brahmin girl. This was the same place where she had previously died eleven days after she delivered her baby boy. This ordinary human girl would turn into the angelic Lalleshwari in the future because she properly utilized her power of free will.

In accordance with the old Kashmiri tradition, her parents got her married when she was twelve years old. Her bridegroom was a Brahmin boy, Nicabhat, who lived in the Pampor village. In the marriage ceremony, Lalleshwari whispered to her family priest, Siddha Shrikanth, that “I shall reveal the answer to you now. My bridegroom here is the baby boy who I delivered in one of my previous births. As my family priest at the time, you held the confinement ceremony for me eleven days after I delivered my baby boy. Now you understand how I am related to him.” The astonished Siddha Shrikanth recalled everything upon hearing what she told him. (Aand Koul, 1921) (Editor Dr. S.S. Toshkhani, 2000) (Jayalal Kaul, 2018) (Kashmir News Network, 2002)

## CONCLUSION

Indian philosophy says that the loftiest goal of human birth is to accomplish release from the wheel of births and deaths, i.e. attain liberation (*moksh*). Amongst all species, the human species is considered the best because the human body is the only vehicle to develop the subtle spiritual centers (*chakras*) completely. For the other living beings, there is no chance to undertake spiritual practice (*yoga sadhana*). Therefore, it is impossible for them to tread the spiritual path and attain liberation (*moksh*). (Swami Rajarshi Muni, 2013) Regarding this matter, Lalleshwari said in one of her poetries that—

*Oh man! Properly know the path for attainment of the Param  
Tattva and embark on the path of self-realization. Like Lalleshwari,  
you too will experience the Param Tattva and lose your fear of  
death.*

May the extraordinary example of Lalleshwari inspire us to cherish our precious human birth and follow in her footsteps.

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