

The Songs of William Blake and Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi: A Spiritual, Mystical, and Literary Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Both William Blake and Sant Lakshmi Sakhi belong to two different religions, cultures, and climes, but their views and visions, images, and imaginations have very close conformity in both matter and manner, which make the readers mesmerized in the realms of spiritualism, mysticism, and literature. William Blake was the late 18th century and early 19th Century mystic and spiritual poet whose classic work "Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience" dealt with spiritualism, mysticism, and romanticism in its rich manifestations with meaning and message not only to the contemporary age but even today in this dry and monotonous age of materialism. Similarly, Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi, the great saint of the Bhojpuri language, was the 19th Century mystic and spiritual poet whose four classic divine works, namely *Amar Sidhi*, *Amar Kahani*, *Amar Bilas*, and *Amar Faras*, are milestones in the field of spiritual and mystical poetry often suffused with the colour and craftsmanship of the various tools and devices of great art and literature. Unfortunately, the language Bhojpuri in which Sant Lakshmi Sakhi has poured his thoughts and messages woven into the fabric of art and beauty, is marginalized today in Bihar, and such classic works that need to be restored, preserved, and upgraded for posterity are in utter negligence. Modern Facebook boys and girls have little concern about such classic legacies. The aforementioned four Granthas of Sant Lakshmi Sakhi, which are called "Granth Ramji," are worshipped in the Samadhi Sthal (Monastery) at Teruwan Math near Sattar Ghat on the bank of pious river Narayani (Gandaki) in the district of Gopalganj, Bihar, India. "Amar Sidhi," and its translation into the English language is being processed. Today, the young generation must know their heritage and legacy, and it is time to wake up with concerted efforts to make "the local to vocal," which is also part and parcel of the Modern Indian Knowledge System of Education.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge System, Sant Sahitya, Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi, Teruwan Math, Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, Spiritualism, Mysticism, Yogic Concentration, Ram Sahitya, William Blake.*

Both William Blake and Sant Lakshmi Sakhi are spiritual poets par excellence. William Blake was a great symbolist poet of English literature. His magnum opus, "Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience," is a classic work of great symbolism. 'Innocence' here stands for childhood, while 'experience' symbolizes manhood and various evils of grown-up men. The image of both the lamb and the tiger is highly symbolic. The 'lamb' shows childhood and innocence, while the 'tiger' stands for experience and knowledge.

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William Blake, the renowned English poet, painter, and printmaker, is often regarded as a visionary and mystic. While not a saint in the traditional religious sense, Blake's life and work embody many saintly qualities, particularly in his spiritual insights and profound influence on art and literature.

Swami Vivekananda, a key disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and a significant figure in the introduction of Indian philosophies to the Western world, had a unique perspective on saints. According to him, a saint is someone who has attained a high level of spiritual realization and lives a life of selfless service and devotion to God.

Vivekananda emphasized that saints are individuals who have transcended the ego and worldly desires, dedicating themselves entirely to the divine and the welfare of humanity. He believed that faithful saints are characterized by their purity, wisdom, and compassion, and they inspire others through their exemplary lives.

Similarly, Sant Lakshmi Sakhi is a great saint and poet of the Bhojpuri language of the Saran region of Bihar. His poetry is full of symbols, and they are so beautifully and artistically presented that they call for critical attention.

Lakshmi Sakhi is the poet and saint par excellence in Bhojpuri language. As a saint, he is in the grand tradition of Saint Kabir, Bhinak Ram, Guru Nanak, Namdev, and many other such saints who contributed a lot to enhance and upgrade the spiritual and metaphysical concepts of man and God, Man and Nature, and above all, man and man. Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi is of the opinion that every man is capable of attaining spiritual bliss if he knows the art of uprooting the various evils engendered by the five senses. In other words, every individual has a divine spark hidden under the cover of the ashes. The only thing needed is to sweep away the covering layer of the ashes so as to kindle the spark. It will be possible only through the process of Yoga under the guidance and blessings of a true teacher (Satguru) who prevents one from indulging in the material world of the five senses. Perhaps this is why, in most of his spiritual poems, Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi is seen putting much stress on building a good personality full of character, culture, and devotion. So, by purging the dross of desire, the devotee after opening the lock of spiritual world may reach the world of evergreen light where there is no grief and sorrow, trials and tribulations of the day to day life; where the sweet mangoes of God pour automatically at both ends " Barho maas Jahan farela aama/ tap tap chuyela dunu samaa"(Amar Kahani,21) ; where God is the most handsome husband of the bride soul of Lakshmi Sakhi “

Lakshmi Sakhi ke sundar piyawa” *; where the devotees always listen to the voice of consciousness “hota anhad naad bajat shankh aur muhchand”(Amar Kahani,142) and where the devotee who assumes himself as the bride of the Great Handsome Husband (Sundar piyawa) even goes to the extent of dancing, singing and burning the light in the soul so as to make the husband gleeful and smile “Naachab gaayab Piya ke rijhayeb/ jiyara me barbo aakash”(Amar Sidhi,263) and above all, wherever the devotee sees, he sees only Ram and Ram and Ram and nothing else “Jahan jahan dekhi tahan Ram Ram sagaro”(Amar Sidhi 41). It is said about him that once it so happens that in his Ashram (hermitage), he merged himself so fully in God that he put the sandals of people on his head, saying I have got the sandals of Ram or the Pramata. *" Mili gaile ho mera Ram ke panahiya" **

Blake's visionary experiences and mystical revelations set him apart as a spiritual figure. He believed that he received direct communication from higher realms and often depicted these visions in his art and poetry. His works are infused with deep spiritual themes, exploring the Nature of the divine, the human soul, and the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Blake was a staunch critic of organized religion and conventional societal norms. He saw these institutions as oppressive and corrupt, stifling the true spiritual Nature of humanity. His works often challenge established doctrines and advocate for personal spiritual awakening. Sant Lakshmi Sakhi also stresses leading a divine and blissful life in most of his spiritual poems.

Blake's unwavering commitment to his artistic vision and moral principles further aligns him with saintly qualities. Despite facing financial hardship and limited recognition during his lifetime, he remained dedicated to his work and his beliefs. His integrity and perseverance in the face of adversity reflect the qualities of a saintly figure.

Blake's influence extends far beyond his own time, inspiring generations of artists, writers, and thinkers. His exploration of profound spiritual and philosophical themes has earned him a place among the great visionary artists. Many view Blake as a prophet-like figure whose insights into the human condition continue to resonate deeply.

While William Blake may not be a saint in the traditional religious sense, his visionary mysticism, rebellion against orthodoxy, artistic and moral integrity, and enduring influence

position him as a spiritual and inspirational figure. His contributions to art and literature transcend mere creativity, offering profound insights into the spiritual and metaphysical realms.

Very little is known today about Lakshmi Sakhi's personal life, parentage, and childhood. In this regard, I am very grateful to Sant Janardhan Sakhi, a blind saint by birth, the present Mahant of the Samadhi Sthal of Lakshmi Sakhi situated on the bank of the sacred river Narayani at Teruwan Math, who made this tedious work of writing easy by sharing his views about the life and works of Lakshmi Sakhi. The other reliable and authentic source for getting a glimpse of the life and vision of Lakshmi Sakhi is the book "Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi: Sadhana Aur Sahitya" by Dr. Lalan Pandey, who has done his research for the degree of Ph.D in Hindi literature on this Great Soul. I am very thankful to him not only for providing sufficient stuff for the present article but also for igniting the light of spiritualism lying dormant in my soul.

Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi composed four great religious scriptures: I. Amar Sidhi, II. Amar Kahani, III. Amar Vilas and IV. Amar Faras. About the words of this book, Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi is of the opinion that the words are not labored but are poured to him by God, his Most Handsome Bridegroom. In his works, he worships God as a husband and assumes himself as a wife of God. Like William Blake, he too often goes into the world of divine imagination and merges himself fully in the world of spiritualism and mysticism, forgetting this mundane world. When William Blake was a child, he used to gaze at the clouds and other natural objects and merge himself, thoroughly contemplating the wonderful works of God.

Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi is of the opinion that every man is capable of attaining spiritual bliss or glorious divine vision if he knows the art of uprooting the various evils engendered by the five senses. In other words, every individual has a divine spark hidden under the cover of the ashes. The only thing needed is to sweep away the covering layer of the ashes so as to kindle the spark, and it will be possible only through the process of Yoga under the guidance and blessings of Satguru. This is what the famous Sant Kavi has elaborated in his immortal works. The Bhojpuri language is replete with various beautiful poetic creativities that are still unnoticed. Some of the poets, particularly the saint poets of Saran district, have laid several milestones in literature both thematically and stylistically.

The present age is full of tensions, turmoil, and terrors. People seldom pay attention to the lost virtue and rich culture. There is nothing but a moral and spiritual breakdown everywhere; men

wash their mirrors regularly, but they seldom clean their mirrors of the self. So, in this age of deprivation and disillusionment, the morals and teachings of Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi and William Blake will prove to be a boat to sail across the turbulent waters of the modern age.

"The Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience" is a classic work of English literature. It has the elements of both classicism and romanticism. He laid the foundations of the golden period of Romantic Poetry. The world of the "Songs of Innocence" is a child's world with a child's longingness and desire, a child's delights and dreams, a child's simplicity and innocence, a child's purity and happiness. The child in the poems is secure and chaste.

Both parts, "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience" represent two types of feelings. In "Songs of Innocence," Blake finds the spiritual and divine joys in the golden period of childhood, in complete harmony with God and Nature. In this state of divine imagination, there is no irritation, but though the state of innocence is wonderfully charming, it is not everything and can not last long to attain a higher state of mind. Suffering, the ups and downs of life must test it. Afterward, the child has to go through the experience of life. This is the link between songs of innocence and songs of experience.

One of the characteristics of innocence is free life from the shackles of prejudices, limitations, and artificial conventions. However, experience gained from every walk of life breaks free life, and it substitutes dark gold imprisoning fear. The result is a deadly blow of various fetters of caste, class, and creeds to this happy human spirit. This fear breeds hypocrisy, which Blake hits hard.

William Blake was a great mystic poet and a visionary. That is why there is a fondness and fascination for symbols. In his poetry, there is hardly any poem that does not have a symbolic and allegorical meaning. Both William Blake and Sant Lakshmi Sakhi are richly guided and influenced by some divine forces. Blake says in his very first introductory poem that the child in the clouds advised the poet to compose poems of eternal values. He says :

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,

Moreover, he laughing said to me:

Pipe a song about a Lamb

So I piped with merry cheer Piper, pipe that song again

So I piped, he wept to hear." (Songs of Innocence 3)

Here, the spiritual vision and inspiration through imagination in the lap of Nature, as well as through a child, speak volumes of things. We all know that the world of a child is the world of innocence, divinity, and bliss. The imagination of a child is pure and untainted. It is always on the wings of poetry and dreams. A child is the embodiment of innocence and ignorance, purity and sanity. The felicity and enjoyment that a child gets is similar to the supreme bliss or paramananda of a great Yogi who attains this divine happiness after purging his 'dross of desire' in the fire of austerity, tolerance, and other virtuous human qualities. This is what Sri Aurobindo presents in this short but epigrammatic poem. "A Child's Imagination". He gives the epithet 'golden image' to a child:

O thou golden image

Miniature of bliss

Speaking sweetly, speaking meetly,

Every word deserves a kiss." (Aurobindo, A Child's Imaginations, stanza 1)

Here, Sri Aurobindo has high esteem for children. He gives two beautiful and suggestive phrases, 'miniature of bliss' and 'golden image' for a child. As a matter of fact, the life of a child is free from worries, deep distress, and worldly affairs. He is happy both inward and outward. He is free from the evils of society; he has nothing to do with caste, class, and creed. All his activities are centered on his childhood's pleasures. His state of mind is just like a perfect Yogi who has renounced the pleasures of senses and is fully happy and absolutely satisfied with his realm of permanent.

This is precisely what we find in the spiritual and mystical poetry of Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi Ji. About the words of his four Granthas (Spiritual Books), Sant Kavi Lakshmi Sakhi is of the opinion that the words are not labored but are poured to him by God, his Most Handsome Bridegroom. In his works, he worships God as a husband and assumes himself as a wife of God. About his writings, the saint poet observes:

Shabd aaye Amarlok se

Rahe trikuti me chhaye

Sundar Piyawa chun chun ke

Dihalan hai batlay

(Amar Sidhi 59)

(I have not written the words of these books; instead, they came from Amarlok, the place of God. They are rambling in the unconscious and the subconscious stage of my mind. The credit for composing these books goes to my Most Handsome Husband, i.e., God, who selected words and gave me to write)

The above poetic observation of Lakshmi Sakhi Ji Maharaj reminds us of the great poet S.T. Coleridge, who defines poetry as "The best words at the best place is called poetry." Baba Lakshmi Sakhi uses the phrase "chun chun ke," which means the best-selected words given by the most handsome husband, that is 'God.' This also shows that great poetry always comes to the childlike heart of a poet through inspiration.

Lakshmi Sakhi was of the opinion that excellent knowledge could not be gained by pedantic knowledge of books and scriptures but could be achieved easily through self-introspection. He says:

Atna je padhlis te Angrejia, farasiya

Tab kahe na kaylis te aatam darasiya (Amar Sidhi)

(If you have read so many books on English and the Farsi language, then tell me, why didn't you know the voice of your consciousness or introspect yourself?)

This couplet reminds us of Kabir.

Aatam gyan bina sab suna

Kya Mathura kya Kashi

Pani bich min pyasi

Mohe suni suni aawat hansa (Kabir Granthawali)

(Without the proper knowledge of Self-introspection or the visualization of one's soul, it is futile to visit Mathura and Kashi, the religious places. Kabirdas is surprised to see that the fish in the water is thirsty for water.)

William Blake, in his famous poem "The Little Black Boy," presents an excellent process of getting rid of various artificial problems through the purification of mind and soul. The little

black boy complains to his mother that the white boys do not play with him but rather hate and taunt him. The mother soothes the child in her lap with the caressing hands and says:

For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish ; we shall hear His voice,
Saying : 'Come out from the grove, My love and care
And round My golden tent like lambs rejoice. (Songs of Innocence, 13)

Let us study these lines on the connotative and philosophical levels. In that case, it clearly shows how the man facing the pains of outward problems may quickly get over by going to the world of God through the purification of the body, mind, and soul. This is what we often find in most of the religious verses of Lakshmi Sakhi. In one of his famous songs, he gives a detailed process of the purification of the body, mind, and soul with the help of some beautiful metaphors and similes:

Chalu Sakhi chalu dhole mankar maiyili
Shabad ke rahiya surati kar ghaili
Trikuti Ghat par saunan bhayili
Joral bare Brahma agin kar chaili
Uje kaya karahi me usinal gayili
Gyan kar mungara bajaran bhayili
Sahaj me kapara safed hoyi gayili
Lakshmi Sakhi penhi odhi aanand bhayili
Dhobia ke dihlani angeya kasaili. (Amar Vilas, 104)

(O Sakhi, let us wash the dirt off our minds. For washing, the 'Divine Word' will act as a detergent (rahiya, the soil full of caustic property) and your body as the pitcher of water. Mixing the soil with a cloth will be done on the Trikuti Ghat. Then, the cloth was heated in the cauldron of the earthly body by the divine fire (Brahma Agni). Then, after proper heating of the cloth, it was beaten by the Mungra (a thick, small washing stick). So after some time, the cloth was thoroughly washed, and it became very white. Lakshmi Sakhi took this washed cloth on his body and became very glad. Then he gave the washerman Kasauli (betel nut) to carry his message to God.)

Here, the extended metaphor of the various processes of washing the cloth is very remarkable and interesting. It is very akin to the yogic process of an expert yogi to get spiritual knowledge and bliss. The philosophy of the poet is not dry and monotonous; rather, it is suffused with the various colors of poetic beauty and poetic Truth.

As a matter of fact, when a child is born, he is very chaste and pure, but as he grows up in society, he slowly comes in contact with various evils engendered by his mind and also by society. Rousseau says that in the state of Nature, man was simple, innocent, and ignorant, but that society corrupted him. In other words, the man who has come from the hands of Nature is good, but the man who has come from the hands of society is terrible. So, a man who wants to get his mind purified goes to the shelter of an expert washerman (Satguru) who gives him various tips and methods to clean the dirty cloth. This image reminds us of Sant Kavi Kabir Das, who says:

Soyi chaadar Sur Nar Muni odhe, odhi ke maiyili kini chadariya;

Das Kabir jatan se odhi, jas ki tas dhari dini chadariya. (Das, Kabir: Mystic Songs of Kabir, 19)

(Gods and sages, saints and men, all got the same chaddar for use. However, they made it dirty by careless use. Das Kabir used with utmost care and returned as bright as when made.)

So, what matters most in man's life is not to decorate the outward skin or body but to know, rise, and awaken the inner strength to become a perfect man. Perhaps this is why in William Blake's poem, the mother rightly teaches the lessons of Truth to her weeping child, saying:

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove. (The Little Black Boy 11)

In the poem "On Another's Sorrow," William Blake is of the opinion that if you fully devote yourself to God or if you have all the virtuous qualities, you are bound to be served by God at the time of your deep distress and untold agonies. The poet observes:

He doth give His joy to all
He becomes an infant small
He becomes a man of woe

He doth feel the sorrow too.
Think not thou canst sigh a sigh
And thy Maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
Moreover, thy Maker is not near.
O! He gives to us His joy
That our grief He may destroy;
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan. (On Another's Sorrow 20)

This suggests that the divine being (referred to as "He") offers His joy and happiness to us with the intention of eradicating our sorrow and pain. The idea is that divine joy has the power to eliminate human grief. These lines emphasize the empathetic Nature of the divine being, who remains with us in our moments of suffering. Even while we are in pain, He stays by our side, sharing in our distress until our grief is wholly gone. The use of "moan" signifies that He feels our pain deeply and mourns along with us.

The passage conveys a powerful message about the Nature of divine compassion and empathy. It portrays a loving and caring presence that not only provides joy to counteract sorrow but also remains steadfastly with us through our darkest times, sharing in our suffering until it is fully alleviated. This depiction of a divine figure highlights a profound sense of love, support, and solidarity with humanity. The same type of love and affection God has for his devotees can be seen in several spiritual songs of Lakshmi Sakhi. The poet imagines God as the most excellent Vaid (doctor) of all the diseases of the world. He says:

*Sunu Sakhi sunu tani man karu dhira,
Januk Baidya bani aile ha Kabira,
Dekhate sakal hari lihale ha peera,
Uje hathawa me lihale Balam Khira,
Khatahin matal hewal sarira,
Sahat rahehun ham agini ke peera ,
Bari re bayas mora komal sharira,
Lakshmi Sakhi ke jaise mital peera ,*

Sabhani ke meton palato baanjh sarira (Amar Vilas 1)

(Concentrating your mind, Listen, O Sakhi, listen to my experience. When I was suffering from a dangerous disease, God, who is the most excellent Vaid(Doctor), came to me and gave me a Balam Khira (an Ayurvedic cucumber often big and old) to eat. Just after taking this Balam Khira, the disease vanished, and very soon, I got cured. I was half-matured, and my body was very soft and sensitive. I was suffering from several types of pain in my physical and mental body. However, when the Great Vaid came, all pain and grief vanished in a moment. Now I pray to that Great Vaid to take away the pain and grief of all the people of the world in the same manner as he has made me free from diseases.)

Here, the poet's presentation of God as a great Vaid (doctor) is very suggestive and thought-provoking. In almost all the religions of the world, it is said that God is both our father and mother. So, the parent must ensure that their children are free from any disease.

The same type of God's Grace and fatherly love and affection may be seen in Blake's other poem, "The Little Boy Found." This poem shows that God's blessings are always with the innocent. The emphasis is on God's help and guidance and not on the child's helplessness. The world of children is near Paradise, and the spirit of God is always by their side to help them:

The little boy lost in the
lonely fen,
Led by the wandering light, they Began to cry, but God, ever nigh
He appeared like his father, in white
He kissed the child and, by the hand,
And to his mother brought,
Who in sorrow pale, through the lonely dale,
Her little boy weeping sought. (The Little Boy Found 37).

To sum up, the works of William Blake and Lakshmi Sakhi explore themes of divine greatness, human efforts, and divine Grace.

Both poets emphasize the omnipotence and benevolence of the divine. William Blake, in his poems such as "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," often reflects on the majesty of God's creations, portraying God as a loving and all-powerful creator. Lakshmi Sakhi, through her devotional works, similarly exalts the divine, celebrating God's magnanimity and infinite kindness.

The idea of human beings striving to purify themselves and attain a higher state of existence is central to both poets. Blake's work frequently touches on the theme of self-improvement and spiritual enlightenment, urging individuals to overcome their base desires and seek higher truths. Lakshmi Sakhi's poetry also reflects this journey, portraying human efforts to transcend worldly desires and attain spiritual purity through devotion and righteous living.

In both Blake and Lakshmi Sakhi's poetry, there is a strong emphasis on the solace and support provided by the divine during difficult times. Blake's works often highlight God's presence and guidance during moments of sorrow and struggle, providing comfort and hope. Lakshmi Sakhi's devotional poetry echoes this sentiment, depicting God's blessings and mercy as a source of strength and solace in times of trials and tribulations.

The synthesis of these themes in their works underscores a universal truth about the human condition and the divine. Both poets illustrate that despite the hardships and challenges one faces, there is always the divine presence that offers Grace, guidance, and redemption. Their poetry serves as a beacon of hope, reminding readers of the transformative power of divine love and human perseverance.

Through their profound and evocative poetry, William Blake and Lakshmi Sakhi both celebrate the grandeur of the divine, the relentless human quest for spiritual elevation, and the unwavering divine support during life's adversities. Their works continue to inspire and uplift, resonating deeply with readers across different cultures and epochs. The poetic contributions of Sant Lakshmi Sakhi to the Bhojpuri language are exciting and very philosophical and literary. It is now time to abide by the slogan "Local to Vocal" and restore and upgrade the great literature of more than a dozen saint poets of the Bhojpuri language, including Lakshmi Sakhi Ji.

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**This sentence often comes at the end of every poem composed by Lakshmi Sakhi.*

***It is not written in any book, but the local people of the Ashram often narrate this famous quote.*