

The Divine Search: Baul Singers of Bengal



***Baul Dibakar Das, Village Parul Danga, Bolpur,
District Birbhum***

The seemingly-miraculous achievements of Indian civilization, consistently over the ancient and medieval periods, have been because of a great sense of dedication. This dedication has come from a deep study of the science of life. Philosophy has been a way of life of the Indian people.

What is remarkable is that the most sophisticated ideas of Indian philosophy have been a heritage of the

people. Even the most common people have been deeply aware of the philosophic truths.

Today, even in the fast-changing and commercializing world, pockets of traditional Indian thought and tradition survive.

The Bauls of Bengal are among these.

Song:

I have lost my caste but I am not yet satisfied. I hunger for more, my beloved friend, my Lord...My whole life is burning - Now what do I do, oh Lord?... I cannot sit still any longer and my mind is no longer content



***Baulini Pratima Das, Village Parul Danga,
Bolpur, District Birbhum***

to stay at home...

I suffer so deeply - my beloved friend, my Lord...I have lost my caste but I am not yet satisfied. I hunger for more, my beloved friend, my Lord... (translated from Bengali)



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In 2005 UNESCO included Baul singing in their list of the worlds master pieces of oral and intangible heritage.

The word Baul probably comes from the Sanskrit viyakul meaning impatiently eager. Some consider them to be insane, in a divinely inspired way. Indeed they are far from the sanity of the materialistic and mundane world.

Song:

In this world, some are insane with the nectar of love...Others crazed in their avarice for material goods...They are immersed in their physical desires; they do not pay any heed to truth...I could never find someone who is as insane as I am...I could never become completely insane...Because I could never find someone who is as insane as I am... (translated from Bengali)

They are ecstatically impatient to lose themselves. To lose their own identities, to see themselves as a part of the greater one. That one which is also within.

Song:

Oh you crazy mind of mine...And I told my mind to go to Vrindavan...You will be able to see the wonderful things happening there with your own eyes...This mad mind of mine tells me that it is busy with material objects and wealth.....Hence it will not be able to leave behind this wealth and go to Vrindavan...(translated from Bengali)

Though they are very open to both the Hindu and Muslim faiths, Bauls have a philosophy focused on the individual himself. It is a personal, spiritual quest they follow. They believe that if there is any God, it is that which is within us.

The Bauls have very simple way of looking at life. The images that they use in their songs are very simple images something which touches upon the everyday life of people around this place.



***Baul Nimai Goswami, Suri Para, Bolpur,
Birbhum District***

Song:

...if you want to board this train you must have a ticket of "bhakti"...Which one of you wants to board the train of Krishna's love? Come with me...This entire train is made up of 4 classes, "dharma, artha, kama and moksha" –Passengers designated to each of these compartments board only those particular ones...Which one of you wants to board the train of Krishna's love? Come with me...(translated from Bengali)

Song:

It is after wandering for many lakhs of births...It is after wandering for many lakhs of births...that you were lucky enough to get this birth as a human being...if this birth too were to go waste, oh crazy mind of mine, then you will never get it back again...No, I will not permit you to leave. I will keep you in my heart – (translated from Bengali)

Today, Bauls are found in trains, railway stations, platforms, on the road, in village corners, almost everywhere. It is a carrying forward of the tradition in modern times. Whereas earlier people used to gather in the villages to listen to the Bauls. Today here he is in the crowded railway trains and people are entertained by him.

Lalon Fakir, the greatest-known singer of this traditions, was born in 1774, in a small village in the district of Kushtia, which is now in Bangladesh. His family lived in extreme poverty and he had no formal education. Lalon became one of the greatest mystic-singers of the Indian sub-continent. He composed thousands of songs. These continue till today as the greatest inspiration for the Bauls and Fakirs of Bengal.

No one knew Lalon Fakir's real name, date, place of birth or the names or religious affiliations of his parents. Both Hindu and Muslim communities try to own him for themselves. Lalon was neither. He constantly strove to go beyond all religious boundaries.



*Song:
Everyone asks, what is
Lalon's caste in this
world? Lalon says, a
Muslim man is known by
circumcision. Then how
can a Muslim woman be
identified? A Brahmin is
known by his sacred
thread, but then how
would I recognise a
Brahmin woman?
Everyone asks, what is
Lalon's caste in this
world? (translated from
Bengali)*

***Baul Kashinath Das, Village Parul Danga,
Bolpur, District Birbhum***

It is wonderful that
villagers living in such
remote places in this

country, are so deeply versed in philosophy. In fact that is one of the amazing things about India. Philosophy was never kept as a subject to be studied at the universities. It was always something which was used in daily life it was practiced in daily life by the people by the common people, by everybody. As a matter of the fact, some of the most important epics and scriptures of Indic philosophy were written by the most common people.

The concept of the illusory nature of the material world maya or mithya has been known to all Indians since times immemorial. They have sort different ways different paths to escape from this web of the illusion of life and to attain knowledge.

Song:

Brahma is "nirakaar" (formless) But He manifests Himself in many forms– The one who has attained divine or true knowledge Knows that in "kalyug" man is the avatar of Brahma. All worship is fulfilled in the recognition of man as the true Guru (translated from Bengali)

This is the treasured heritage of the Indian people. A vision of life which looks always towards the eternal. A vision which recognizes material aims and objects as only ephemeral things, a "passing" illusion. The search is always for that which is beyond, that which can only be found within.

True knowledge in Indian thought is always experienced knowledge. Knowledge which is known, knowledge which is felt deep inside, knowledge which transforms one's life. That is Knowledge, not that which is just read from books.