

Lalon's 'Moner Manus' (Man of the Heart), Theories within Songs: a discourse on Folk Songs as an Effective Medium of Theories to Reach General Masses

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'Marginal' and 'Marginality' are much discussed words of this present social and literary world. Marginal, is considered to be at lower or outer limit, as of social acceptability. But Marginalized groups cannot always be found on the rhetorical "outside." It is only by chipping away at the idea of a homogenous culture that we can find the marginalized communities. They more often than not were somehow entrenched in the culture at large. The reasons for their entrenchment, as often as the reasons for their marginality, are revelatory. The ways that the groups were defined were often reflective of the ideals of the community. To clarify, marginalized groups were often attributed qualities that were the antitheses of the ideal qualities of the greater populace. Therefore, it is clear that marginalized groups were necessary to the vitality and understanding of a community's sense of itself.

There are so many branches of 'marginal' studies like gender studies, dalit studies etc. and there are so many theories related to these studies in our social and educational market. Social scientists, theorists are generating their theory by their own way sometimes by their field works (it may be call as first hand experiences), sometimes by studies from soft copies and hard copies. The point is that all these emerge from some urban areas by some well educated people. Keeping a main issue/topic at the centre, they are finding out the marginal and in most cases they are successful to bring those into the urban intelligentsia. By using some heavy weighted words we are at urbanized area trying to discuss the marginal; what will these really do for that marginal? For example; an illiterate woman from remote rural area is unable to write her name properly, what will 'feminism' theory do for her? Will feminism work like touchstone to her and she will raise her voice against all social injustices for which she is suffering? The answer is probably 'no'. Now I am moving towards the word 'religion'. There are so many religions we have in this world and in India we have major religions like Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and two or more others. If we take these religions as main stream religions then we have some other marginal religions also which are called folk religions like 'Baul-Fakir', 'Sahebhdhanis', 'Kartabhajas', but very few scholars have held their pen for theses marginalized religious studies. By the said words my aim is to say that a marginalized best know their marginal condition/ conditions and the voice of that marginal is the voice of the marginalized. Fakir Lalon Shah, is a marginal folk guru and his songs are the voices of marginal. Through his songs, by the use of simple day to day used word he has tried to show the real condition of the society.

Lalon Shah was a Bengali Baul saint, mystic, songwriter, social reformer and secular thinker. Bauls, a sect of folk religion, constitute a small group in numerical strength but they exceed all sorts of limits and bindings in their age-long effort to propagate their philosophical understandings and deep-rooted modes of behaviour through melodious songs and artful dances. Belonging to the tradition-bound community of Bengal, the Bauls bear a rich cultural heritage of the country which has developed through a long process of interactions and harmonization of different manners, customs and practices pertaining to various socio-religious traditions. A short

glance on the origin of Baul tradition may clear us how it is a harmonization of different manners, customs and practices. Around the middle of the thirteenth century, the whole of Bengal fell into Muslim hands, and the new rulers launched a campaign for the spread of Islam. As a consequence, a great many people who held marginal positions within the structure of Hindu society, many of whom may have been Sahajiyas, embraced Islam. Some, however, became converts in name only, as a survival tactic, and continued to follow their Sahajiya practices. These Muslim Sahajiyas were among the first fakirs of Bengal. At the same time, various Sufi orders of Islam began to penetrate Bengal. As they essentially practiced a cult of mystic love, their creed was based on self-realization and was found to have many features in common with the Sahajiya tradition. A large number of people became their recruits, including the Muslim Sahajiyas, who found in Sufism a kind of shelter from the oppression of orthodox Islam. This led very naturally to considerable intermingling of ideas. Even the Vaisnava Sahajiyas, who had emerged with renewed vigor after the advent of the great Vaisnava saint Sri Caitanya Deva in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, did not escape the influence of Sufi mysticism. Out of this background-Sahajiya for the most part, but somewhat colored by Sufi ideology-emerged the sect of the Bauls, which thus included within its fold both Hindus and Muslims, especially of the lower strata of society. Bauls would seem to have begun to be widely spread in Bengal only around the middle of the seventeenth century and it still exists.

The origin of Baul tradition and the community, at a sense, clearly shows the tensions of their existence, their marginal condition at the society which leads them to their secret 'sadhana' (meditation) for 'Moner Manus' (Man of the heart). As most of the peoples from Baul community are illiterate, they follow the oral tradition and their songs descend from generation to generation only by listening and memorizing process. As they are from the common masses their songs are decorated with simple and rustic allegory and at the same time they show the contemporary society, its good and evils mainly to the village folks. Fakir Lolon Shah (1774-1890) is the main pioneer and the greatest spoke-person of the marginalized Baul tradition of the undivided Bengal.

Lalon has not followed any particular religion; rather he has tried to blend the Hindu-Muslim binary. According to Lalon, Baul-Fakirs are those whose path is;

"The Vedas on the right

The Quran on the left

Fakir's path is in the middle"

'Man' is the first and final concern in the songs of Lalon. Greek thinker Protagoras says, "Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are and of things that are not that they are not."¹ Those who blindly believe on god and religion do not allow men's supreme position rather their religious dominance, abstract philosophy and scriptures force men to go through the religious, cultural and socio-economical differences. By the concept of rebirth and heaven they try to control human beings which make men a helpless doll of the fate. Through the folk-materialistic outlook Lalon preach that if this world is created by the same Creator, if this world is His cosmic enblame then why this caste system, why so many religions, why this gender discriminations, why these class dominations and the Bauls try to create a 'man' based society and culture. Lalon never seemed to believe in the scriptural orthodoxy or in this core Islamic belief that the holy books were God send;

"What message did our Lord send

Were different messages sent to

Different lands by different Gods
 If the holy books are written
 By the same God
 Then they should not be different
 Since they are written by men
 They remain so different."

Lalon and his followers were never the etherealised bauls as the Bengalee middle class intelligentsia has constructed them and liked to see them as. Lalon and his followers were "bartamanpanthis" (for the present material life) in opposition to the "anumanpanthi" (the world of belief).

Lalon sings;
 "You will find the priceless gem
 At the present
 Worship the simple Man as divine
 Worship the human feet
 You will get the
 Quintessence of eternity
 With death everything vanishes
 Know that as soon as you can
 There is heaven after death
 Does not convince me
 For an unknown future
 Who discards the present world?"

At Lalon's contemporary era, which is marked as Bengal Renaissance, The Hindu intellectuals ignored both the Hindu and the Muslim masses. In the agrarian sphere this separation from the masses created a very disturbing situation to the zamindars who were mostly Hindus. The socio-economic interests of the peasants later came to acquire a somewhat religious tone, with the emergence of the Faraizi and Wahabi movements. The Faraizi movement started in 1818. The objectives of these movements were to keep Islam in Bengal beyond the pale of un-Islamic influence. The politico-religious movement of the Faraizi-Wahabie aders was the "reactions, not remedies, to the situation the existing."² Thus Renaissance had failed to gather maximum mass from different community under one shade and it was not the fruit of the joint venture of Hindu and Muslim and it had failed to bring both the communities come close; rather these differences, hatred, opposition and negligence's had increased day by day. In Baul songs, particularly in songs of Lalon we can see a triumph to bring all the community together. The main concern of Renaissance, that is communal harmony, finds its way and becomes prominent into the illiterate but self-learned people's songs. The main breath of this humanitarian revolution in rural Bengal was Fakir Lalon Shah. He has seen that this religious conflict even putting barrier in his way of preaching peace, so annoyed Lalon utters:

"Fakiri korbi khyapa kon raga,
 Ache Hindu-Musalman dui vagh ea...."
 "How can you be an ascetic
 Hindus and Muslims are divided
 Muslims want the paradise

Hindus are eager to be in
Hindu heaven
Islamic or Hindu
Any heaven seems a jail
Who wants to be there".

In the Baul tradition, far age before the concept the 'women studies', they are advocating the independence of the women. In Baul tradition women have a special importance and value. They consider women as 'prakiti'(nature) and men as 'purus'(man); without 'purus' and 'prakiti' any creation or well deed is not possible. To them men and women possess the equal power as Lalon says:

"Adam bolo kon nure hoy
Ma houa ki sei nure nai..."

means, if Adam is made of light (nur) and Eve is made from Adam, then both share the same thing. Eve is also a mother, so through Eve (woman), the power and love of God is spreaded all over the world.

In his songs Lalon has given women higher position, Lalon sings;

"The original Mecca is human body

Try to understand

Why are you tiring yourself roaming around the word

God has created the human Mecca

With the celestial light

.... ..

Lalon says in that secret Mecca

The high priest is a woman."

In this patriarchal society where woman's identity as human being is in crisis, Lalon overtly announces that it's a mother; a woman fixes a child's real identity. Lalon also sings;

"The covert truth

Comes to light

By adulating mother

One learns the identity of father

Who was inside the egg

Whom did he see after coming out?"

Sometimes through his sharp allegory, sometimes directly in his songs, Lalon advocates the independence and the independent thinking of women. Lalon utters-

"Kuler bou hoye mone r kotodin thakbi ghore,

Ghomta fele chol na re mone sadh-bazare."

This means how long you will stay at home as house-wife, now leave your feminine code and come to your land of your own will. This is still some of places of our country cannot overtly express. These words are much more effective to the remote rural illiterate women than the heavy weighted words often used by the theorists/scholars who are working on 'feminism'.

The most profound theme we can observe in 'Lalon Geete' is Lalon's reaction against class and caste system of Indian society and the religious conflicts. His age old songs are still modern in the context of our present society. When the lalonite Baul singer sings the song:

"Jat gelo jat gelo bole eki ajab karkhana

Satya kaje keu noy raji sab dekhi tana na na.

Jokhon tumi bhobe ele
 Tokhon tumi ki jat chile
 Jabar belai ki jat nile
 Ea-kotha amai bolo na.

Brahmin-chandal chamar-muchi
 Eki jole ea hoi goo shuchi
 Dekhe shune hoi na ruchi
 Johm ea ta kauke charbe na...”.

Through this song Lalon is expressing that he is becoming puzzled by the word religion which is uttered everywhere by everyone while very few are agreed to do for the truth. Lalon asks when men take birth, do they remain aware in which religion they are taking birth? And they know at time of their last ride which religion they would have then. He is also confused in thinking that as the same holy water makes the Brahmin and the outcaste pure and sacred, then why these differences between them in the society? Rejecting the difference in human society by the name of religions and caste, Lalon says,

“If you circumcise the boy, he becomes a Muslim
 What’s the rule for women, then?
 I can recognize the Brahman man from his sacred thread;
 But then how am I to know the Brahman woman?

Tell me, just what does caste look like?
 I’ve never seen it with these eyes of mine, brother!”

By the above discussions of the songs of Fakir Lalon Shah we can clearly understand that; being, staying at the marginal position of the society Lalon’s philosophy is ‘man’ centric who is deeply based on present and humanity. As the voices from marginal Lalon’s songs touch all most all the social issues of the marginal. Without going through any social theory and literary format Lalon by his mediation for ‘moner manus’ (man of heart) has tried to dismiss the class, caste, gender and religious binaries. Fakir Lalon himself is a marginal, the religion he adopted is also a marginal folk-religion i.e. Baul-Fakir, but his journey is always towards the centre that is ‘humanity’ and ‘human values’ and all the social theories of today have emerged keeping the same theme at the centre.

Works Cited:

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2. Nizami, K.A. 'Socio-Religious Movements in Indian Islam (1763-1898)' (Ed. St. Lokhandwalla) pp. 107-108 quoted by Amalendu De., Roots of Separation in Nineteenth century Bengal, Calcutta, 1974 p. 20.