

RECLAIMING LALON AND HIS PHILOSOPHY:
DEHO-TOTTO, TRANSCENDENTALISM AND OUR
ACADEMIA

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

The philosophical and spiritual dimensions of early Bengali literature and Fakir Lalon Shah's significant contribution to that is still an area that requires further research. Grounded in the tradition of the "sahajiya,"¹ Lalon's philosophy demonstrates the fundamental aspects of liberal humanism and individualism as well as the prioritization of the soul over the body. Prominent works of Bengali literature are replete with enlightened borrowings from Lalon, even though his significance as well as wide influence remain unrecognized. Unfortunately, because of the negligence of policy makers in our educational system, most Bangladeshi students often complete their studies without any knowledge of this Sufi saint. We are yet to recover from our colonial hangover, and this is quite evident in our Europeanized educational system. Even though our poet Fakir Lalon's philosophy stands equal to American philosophies like Transcendentalism, our educational system overlooks this aspect. So, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the gap between our institutional education and the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah. In order to do so, I will go through a brief discussion on how the origin of Lalon's philosophy rooted in ancient manuscripts like "Deho-Totto" and "Sahajiyana". Tracing Lalon's history in the ancient texts of our literature, this paper will demonstrate the similarities between Lalon's philosophy and American Transcendentalism, European modernism, the Romantic and Symbolic Movements. Doing so, through a Marxist and New Historicist reading of his works, the paper will try to reconstruct and rescue Lalon and his philosophy and address the some of the gaps between our educational system and Lalon's philosophy and suggest some possible solutions.

¹ Sahajiya was a religious doctrine which believed in the Sahaj or simple way to feel the innate reality that is present in every animate or inanimate object. This cult became popular in 17th century Bengal.

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List of Acronyms

BEIC British East India Company

 The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
UNESCO Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction

Wide and unrestrained access to previously unavailable texts and resources have made literary studies more convenient and flawless compared to often time-consuming and limited researches from the past. We are able to enjoy not only our literature but also the literary works from across the world. Despite this remarkable shift in the nature of research, many significant works of literature still remain unexplored by critics and readers alike. But if we trace back to the beginning of our own literature we will find ourselves in deep water. This takes us back to the ancient manuscripts of songs and poems from which our very own Bengali literature derived gradually. Throughout the history, the poets, philosophers, scholars, writers, lyricists tried to keep the ancient history of our literature alive through their works. Nonetheless, if asked, I can say with certainty, most of our post graduates would not be able to say anything about the origin of Bengali literature. On the other hand, I believe, we do know quite a lot about the history of Western literature and culture and If I am being asked, at least I will be able to name the literary movements that took place in Europe like: The Renaissance, the Neoclassical period, the Romantic period, the Enlightenment period, the Victorian period, the Modern period etc. If we just google ‘literary movements timeline’ this list comes up automatically and one do not have to even mention British or European literary movements. The European periodization of history is the prime reason behind this. This refers to the fact, that history is marked with European events that are used as the names of the different historical periods. They used their glorious historical events as a weapon to spread and establish their superiority during colonization and they had been able to do so to a great extent. As a result, their historical cum literary periods became the face of literature worldwide. Moreover, the scholars of Bangladesh usually complete their higher studies from

the West. There, they are being formed and brain- washed by the Western philosophies and perceptions. That is why, books and resources on Western literature, culture and philosophies are extensively available in our country. Whereas, proper resources on Bengali literature are hard to find. Bengali literary or cultural movements does not even have any proper names of their own. But this does not mean we did not have any. We had our beginning, continuity and now we have our own literature. It is just we are not aware of them. In this way, the dominance of Westernized perceptions and beliefs not only affected our personal lives but also our educational system.

1.1 Research Question

The overarching research question, that is, “Why Lalon as a philosopher, despite being quintessentially rooted in Indian religions, cultures, and customs, is not given proper recognition by Bangladeshi academia?” will be juxtaposed with a number of questions that would direct my research in rescuing and reclaiming Lalon and restating his significance in a global context. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how Lalon’s philosophy derived from ancient Bengali manuscripts and assert the similarities that his philosophy and European philosophy share while the possible reasons for the created gap between educational system and inclusion of Lalon’s philosophy will also be discussed

1.2 Topic Sentences and Supporting Details

Firstly, a brief discussion will be held on the ancient manuscripts from which our own literature derived. Due to the fact, that the history of Bengali literature is a broad subject and there are many events, I will be focusing on some specific events which will eventually help me to connect with my thesis. In this regard, I will talk about “Charyapad”, “Sahajiyana”, and “Deho-Totto”. In order to keep my research precise and focused, I have chosen Fakir Lalon Shah as the repressed Bengali philosopher as I believe his works deserve a place in our

educational system. For example, the 19th century American movement ‘Transcendentalism’ shares many similarities with Lalon’s philosophy as it talks about divinity and power of individualism. As a matter of fact, we usually read about transcendentalism in literature with no reference to Lalon and his philosophy. Even though his philosophy plays an important role in shaping Bengali culture, his works are overlooked in our education. So, lastly the reasons of this issue will be brought up and with some possible solutions that can be made to resolve this.

1.3 Thesis Statement

Hence, the aim of this paper is to identify the created gaps between our institutional education and the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah, the reasons behind the gaps and similarities of Lalon’s philosophies with European philosophies and intellectuals will also be analyzed. I have chosen to go with this topic because I believe this research is going to substantially contribute to the existing knowledge of Bengali literature, most particularly, Baul literature. Not only that, it will also bring out the suppressed literary talents of our literature and culture which is going to enhance our cultural and literary knowledge. In other words, this is an attempt to reclaim our agency in our own history.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

In order to interpret the collected data and conduct my research, I will be going through the following theories. Here, my research will involve a proper investigation of primary and secondary sources such as: books, articles, journals and literary criticisms. Afterwards, gathered information will be analyzed in an interpretative manner. Thus, I will be following Archival and Qualitative Research Methodology to conduct my research. It will allow the readers to critically evaluate the research's overall validity and reliability.

2.1 Marxist Criticism

The 20th century witnessed the avalanche of a number of widely accepted theories in the Liberal Arts and Humanities, and among them Marxist approach to literature and history still remains as a dominant one. Marxist school of criticism aims to explain the world with logical and concrete evidence. Since publication of numerous articles and books by Karl Marx in the 1850s, Marxism has provided a revolutionary way of understanding history and society. Professor Bertell Ollman, in his article "What is Marxism? A Bird's- Eye View", talked about the origin and various aspects of Marxism. "Concentrating on the social and economic relations in which people earn their livings, Marx saw behind capitalist's law and order appearance a struggle of two main classes: the capitalists, who own the productive resources, and the workers or proletariat, who must work in order to survive" (Ollman). Karl Marx was a German philosopher, theorist, economist and historian who examined social organization in a scientific way and perceived human history to have consisted of a series of struggles between classes. Particularly, between the oppressing and the oppressed class, between the ruler and ruled, between the rich and the poor.

2.1.1 Class Distinction

Marx's idea made it clear that class distinction was evident right after from the primitive era and it is still evident. If we go back to the Primitive era or the "primitive communism" as Marx called it, we will see that people were strongly bound by natural constraints during the period, but they were socially very equal. The work distribution might have varied based on gender but there was social equality. Now, if we jump ahead to the Middle ages, we will be able to notice a huge rise of class distinction and a transformation from natural to social constraint. During the period, under Feudalism, there was an entire class of people that never spent any time worrying about where their next meal would come from. They were called as the 'Nobility'. They possessed all the wealth and resources in the society. On the other hand, there was this class, known as the 'Peasantry' who worked constantly to make food, primarily for the nobility and earn livelihood for themselves. Similarly, in sub-continental India, during 19th century, the elite class were the Zamindars who possessed all the property and lands and the role of the lower class was played by the rest; mainly the rural people. In that emerging capitalist period, this class distinction was inevitable because social development is not possible without such distinction. Production was more than needed so there was abundance of surplus, but nothing was equally distributed. Rather, the society was set up in a way so that one class did not need to labor at all, while the other class had to work harder. Thus, from a natural constraint, it turned into a social one. Karl Marx talked about these in the book *Communist Manifesto* (1848) which he produced with his longtime collaborator Friedrich Engels. Here, they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history and focused on relationships among socioeconomic classes, both within a society and among societies. English professor Lois Tyson, provided clear and simple explanations of complex literary theories in her book, *Critical Literary Theory: A User Friendly Guide*. Along with many literary theories, she elaborately talked

about Marxism and its fundamental premises. “From a Marxist perspective, differences in socioeconomic class divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender” (54). Moving ahead, with the passing of Industrialization and rising Capitalism, we witnessed the creation of Urbanization. As a result, the class division continued as the elite versus the poor and the urban versus the rural.

2.1.2 In Relation to Art and Literature

According to Marxists, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. This ideology refers to a belief system produced by the relations between the different classes in a society, classes that have come about because of the modes of production in the society. Consequently, this ideology which is dictated by the dominant class, functions to secure its power. M. H. Abrams, a distinguished American scholar, who has written prize winning books on 18th and 19th century literature, wrote a book named, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, where he defined and discussed critical theories and points of view that are commonly used to analyze, interpret, and write the history of works of literature. He asserted that, Marxists generally view literature “not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as ‘products’ of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era” (Abrams, 149). The production of art is being conducted by the ruling class and the consumption of art is happening under those ideologies. So, the Europeans being the ruling community during the period of colonization, had the authority to shape education process, dictated what art should be consumed, what philosophy should be taught and what history should be known by the others or the colonized groups. Thus, they influenced the educational system of a country, mostly of non-European countries like India and Bangladesh. The influence remains so strong that still now we are following a Westernized education system. Stated by Tyson, “For Marxism, literature does not exist in some timeless, aesthetic realm as an object to be

passively contemplated. Rather, like all cultural manifestations, it is a product of the socioeconomic and hence ideological conditions of the time and place in which it was written” (Tyson, 66). Hence, in the case of my thesis, the Marxist theory of social class is related to art, the production of art and the consumption of art.

2.1.3 Hegemony

A popular educational you tube channel, “Crash Course” published a video titled “Karl Marx & Conflict Theory: Crash Course Sociology #6”, where the presenter explored Marx’s idea of Historical Materialism and Conflict Theory. Additionally, she also discussed how Marx’s ideas gave rise to Gramsci’s idea of “Hegemony”. According to this source, while Karl Marx explained almost everything regarding societal system and history, there were few things which were missed out by him. For instance, he talked about the strong possession of the bourgeoisie or the ruling class in a society but the fact how did they manage to stay in power so effectively and continuously was implicit in his theory. He betokened that as a result of the class conflict, there will be a revolution led by the working class in order to earn their rightful position. But, still now the scenario seems to be the same as before. Inspired from Marx’s class theory, Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci came up with the term ‘Hegemony’ where he argued that the ruling class stays in power through hegemonic culture. It is a dominant set of ideas that are all-pervasive and taken for granted in a society. Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony is mainly about control and power. His key development was to acknowledge that such power and control come about not only through physical power but also through cultural domination. By establishing a set of beliefs by using religion, a set of ideas in educational system and a set of objectives for social status, the ruling class always remained in the driving seat of a society. Therefore, Gramsci’s cultural hegemony is the idea of a dominant group using culture in order to legitimize their dominance. Their ideas shape everyone’s understanding of the social world by blinding

everyone to the realities of things like economic exploitation. According to Tyson, “Marxism works to make us constantly aware of all the ways in which we are products of material/historical circumstances and of the repressive ideologies that serve to blind us to this fact in order to keep us subservient to the ruling power system” (57).

Having said that, I believe one of the major reasons behind the gap between institutional education and exclusion of Lalou’s philosophy is social class and the ideological consumption of art in this capitalist period. Marxism has a significant impact on the social institutions and analyzes how ruling class applies hegemony to the working class and controls everything. Hence, I have selected this theory as it focuses on almost everything that I need to analyze and will help the readers to understand my argument.

2.2 New Historicism

This literary theory was developed in the 1980s through the works of Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt and it is quite similar to Marxism. New Historicism reopened the interpretation of literature to the social, political, and historical milieu that produced it. This idea is based on the fact that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. To a New Historicist, literature is not the record of a single mind, but the end product of a particular cultural moment. Just as Marxism deconstructed Capitalism by analyzing history and culture and provided us a revolutionary way of understanding history and society, New Historicism attempts to situate artistic texts both as products of a historical context and as the means to understand cultural and intellectual history. A traditional historian would say that history is a series of linear events, one caused another, and through objective analysis we will be able to uncover the facts about those historical events. This implies our reliability on the presentation of facts. In contrast, New historicists “don’t believe we have clear access to any but the most basic facts

of history” (Tyson, 283) and focus on interpretation rather than presentation. The impossibility of objective analysis is what bothers them most. As Lois Tyson states, “From this perspective, there is no such things as a presentation of facts; there in only interpretation. Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, for a number of reasons, difficult to produce” (Tyson, 283).

Furthermore, we know about history in the way facts are being presented to us. We rely too much on the presentation of the facts but we hardly get the chance to interpret. By knowing only the presented facts, we get the surface meaning of a given history and thus many small details remain uncovered. Because the amount of research and interpretation that is needed to uncover that, is rare. This is why the impossibility of objective analysis is a matter of major concern for New historicists. Today, we follow a Westernized system of education which is considered as the superior force in almost every sphere of life. As Edward Said asserted in his book *Orientalism*, “the major component in European culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (Said, 7). Because of this belief and system, we miss the chance of knowing a lot about our own culture. Just like we do not know much about Lalon’s divine philosophy and works that shaped our culture to a great extent. Therefore, this theory will help me to analyze the reasons behind the issue of the distortion of Bengali literary history. In addition to that, this theory also focuses on non-literary texts and juxtapose literary and non-literary texts. Lalon’s philosophy is not written or was not combined as a literary text. So, I would like to conduct a close reading in the literary-critical manner, of these non-literary texts as I will be connecting it with the 19th century American movement, Transcendentalism.

2.3 Foucault's Theory of Knowledge/Power

The discussion of New Historicism and Marxism cannot be completed without discussing the work of twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault. He has been hugely influential in shaping understandings of power and study of politics. His goal was to work out nothing less than how power worked and then change it in the direction of a Marxist-anarchist utopia. A better understanding of these also brings out issues like politics of history, Western influences on educational institutions and culture. He had a radically new approach to political questions, and that novel accounts of power and subjectivity were at its heart. In an article published by Victor Pitsoe and Moeketsi Letseka, the interrelation between Foucault's concepts of 'Power' and 'Discourse' was discussed. Speaking of the significance of Foucault's works, they state, "Foucault's work also offers nuanced understandings of the manifestations, functioning and effects of contemporary educational institutions and practices" (Pitsoe and Letseka, 23). Inside and outside of academia, Foucault's work is of interest to anyone looking to better understand and appreciate the subtle ways that power works in social life. Till now, we have talked about distinctions in class and art, where did this distinction emerged from, and who are the superior force. Now, through a detailed analysis of Foucault's theory, we will be able to understand how did the Europeans or the superior ones' established their control in the society. Discourse, epistemology, knowledge and power, these are the key concepts from his philosophy that are going to be conjugated with my research.

To begin with, Foucault was interested in the phenomenon of discourse throughout his career. His primary interest was to identify how discourses define the reality of the social world and the people, ideas, and things that inhabit it. Foucault believed there is only discursive truth, instead of absolute truth. In essence, a discourse refers to the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true. For Foucault, it is an

institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what can be intelligibly thought and said about the world and what cannot. Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* asserts, "Truth is to be understood as system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1969). So, whatever truth is being produced, it is produced in an ordered way keeping in mind the social order. This brings us to the concept of "Epistemology" or "Episteme". It refers to a certain order of things in the real world. Basically focusing on the way our minds are brought up or formed. Because of this formation of mind, we tend to behave in a conscious manner by following conscious structures or rules. Following this, the rules become incorporated so deeply in our minds that we start to get affected even unconsciously and unconscious rules govern our behavior. So, "Episteme" refers to the orderly unconscious structures underlying the production of knowledge in a particular time and space. It is the epistemological field which forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and space. In this way, what we are going to know, discuss and do, is pre-determined. When someone or some authority provides us this discourse, we start to follow them because we tend to think, they are the one, who are knowledgeable and hence, powerful. "Discourse, as a social construct, is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication. For example, those who are in control decide who we are by deciding what we discuss" (Pitsoe and Letseka, 24). And this brings us to the theory of knowledge and power. According to Foucault, knowledge is power. Knowledge is not some property of statements or beliefs that exist separately from relations of power within societies and discourses, but is constituted by and constitutive of them. This power is omnipresent, not because it embraces everything uniformly, but because it comes from everywhere. Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of "episodic" or "sovereign" acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. As

Foucault says, “Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1968). By inducing discourse, the authority is ensuring knowledge and by ensuring knowledge, it is forming power. Thus, we are caught in ideological discursive truth, politics, and social institutions because with power, one can establish what is accepted and what is not. And this gives that authority the power to control or to dominate with consent, which refers to hegemony. It can control individuals, population, institutions, and even a whole culture as Edward Said mentioned, culture is formed within the system of power. As it can be seen, discourse, power, knowledge, all of them are not independent entities but are inextricably related. “Within social contexts, discourse theory is concerned with issues of power and domination” (Pitsoe and Letseka, 24). While discourse creates power, on the other hand, power creates discourses that keeps that power in that position. Furthermore, it is knowledge that gives rise to the power, similarly, it is power that forms knowledge. Professor Seumas Miller who is a senior research fellow in the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, talked about Foucault’s notions of Discourse, Knowledge and Power. He states, “knowledge or episteme- are held to be a function of the power relationships into which the group in question enters. Thus Foucault: ‘Every point in the exercise of power is site where knowledge is formed. Conversely every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power’” (Miller, 117). In this manner, all of these entities are intertwined and alternative to each other with same end result which is, control or domination with consent.

2.4 Cultural Theory

‘Culture’- a small word, heard and discussed by everyone, is surprisingly quite hard to define. A large number of things can be put under the definition of culture as it covers human behavior, mode of living, rites and rituals, religion, education, sports, eating habit, dress-up,

music, literature, paintings, architecture, philosophy and so on. There are divisions under culture and each section belongs to different classes. It means, cultural division or cultural identity often is shaped by the pattern of consumption by a particular class at a given time. In order to have a better understanding of it, let us begin with some basic definitions of culture and its branches.

Culture- The term ‘culture’ has traditionally referred by metaphorical extension as a process of cultivation or improvement within society. It is not possible to think of a society without a particular culture, as in many ways, culture defines us as well as we also define culture. Our behavioral patterns, attitude towards certain dogma, religious actions all these activities accumulate to form our cultural identity. Renowned novelist and Marxist theorist Raymond Williams defines culture in the article “On High and popular Culture” as he says, “It implies at once the general process of human development and the specific organizations of such development in different societies. It implies also both the whole way of life of a people and the practices and products of intellectual work and the arts” (Williams). According to Matthew Arnold, culture begins by meaning two things. Firstly, as he states, “the best that has been thought and said in the world” and secondly, culture is concerned “to make reason and the will of God prevail” (Arnold, 14). So, in other words, quoting professor John Storey, “culture is the endeavor to know the best and to make this knowledge prevail for the good of all humankind” (Storey, 22). During the course of evolution, divisions have been made for culture like- high, low, and popular culture as well as distinctions have also been made between them.

High Culture- In short, ‘High’ culture is the consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusement, tastes and preferences of a society’s elite. According to Raymond Williams, “High culture, then, has no real structure, but at best a professional structure or a

series of professional structure in which people inherit and practice a selection of skills and maintain and disseminate a selection of works” (Williams).

Popular Culture- The term was coined by sociologist Theodor Adorno and it refers to standardized production to manipulate mass society into passivity. Stuart McPhail Hall, a renowned cultural theorist explains popular culture in his article “The Rediscovery of Ideology: The Return of the Repressed in Media Studies” asserts, it is a site where “collective social understandings are created” (Hall). John Storey also defined popular culture by stating, “popular culture is simply culture which is widely favored or well-liked by many people” (Storey, 7). It is also known as the mass culture as it stands for the mass of a society. Basically, it refers to a set of cultural ideas and values that arise from common exposure of a population to the same art forms, cultural activities and communications media. All of these create and become core parts of the “culture industry”, a famous term which was used by social thinkers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

2.4.1 Culture Industry

The term was used to describe how popular culture in the capitalist society functions like an industry in producing standardized products which produce types of people or class. Theodor Adorno in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* talks about culture industry elaborately. He states, “The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries, and the published figures for their directors’ incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products” (95). In “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that culture industry is associated with late capitalism in which all forms of culture including literature, films and music, become part of the capitalist system of production which also has deep cultural mechanisms, not just economical ones.

This system creates desire amongst us and makes us regular consumer. We cannot deny this system because we live on desire and we need to consume in order to live or vice-versa as “our society is a consumer society” (Bauman, 79), as Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman puts in the essay “Tourists and Vagabonds”. The culture industry populates the inner world of people by making them believe the existing social order can satisfy all their desires and needs, by dictating what those needs are. Capitalism feeds the masses with products of a cultural industry to keep them passively satisfied and politically apathetic. A lecturer of the National University of Ireland, Brandt Dainow discussed culture industry in a seminar where he said, “Films, radio and print all form part of a unified industry whose aim is the psychological domination of the masses in the service of capitalist leaders. It is designed to promote submission to the existing power structures and is structured and run so as to prevent communication of alternative ideas” (Dainow, 4). According to Adorno, media content is adapted to mass consumption. The consumer is certain that media is adapted to his needs while, in fact, the culture industry constructs this sentiment in order to strengthen its influence. The dominating class dominates the rest with the establishment of such culture industry. “The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry” (Adorno, 99).

2.4.2 Commodification of Culture

The culture industry takes advantage of the weaker classes by making its content shallow and widely appealing and thus demoting the value of culture. In particular, we are concerned here with the cultural products which made up popular culture in Adorno’s conception, including film, horoscope, jazz, magazines, radio, soap operas, television serials etc. Not only by making its content shallow, culture industry demotes the value of culture also by commodification. In this capitalist era, cultural products, cultural experiences and social relations are being regularly commodified and objectified. We live on desires and we are constantly on the search of new ways of consumption. Thus, the commodification of

culture is on the rise. Commodification means transforming something into a product for commercial purposes, an item to be bought and sold in the market. It is the ability to change a cultural product or service in order to meet consumers' demand and supply. Intangible cultural heritage is frequently employed in the commercial sector, incorporated into many company names, branding, logos, and products. Tangible cultural heritage may also be commodified such as in the case of artworks intended to be sold commercially. Natascha Proschel, a graduate from Modul University Vienna, worked on "Commodification and Culture: How can culture be economically used without selling it out?" in her dissertation. There she asserted, "Commodification has become an eminent subject in today's global society, as it goes hand in hand with consumerism. Every aspect of culture, whether it involves tangible goods such as clothes or intangible factors like traditions and customs, is nowadays transformed into a commodity" (Proschel,8). While it has got its positive sides, there are some negative aspects also which have become the matter of concern for many. To illustrate, as cultural objects become more interchangeable, each one declines in significance and loses its 'aura' and authenticity. The German philosopher, Walter Benjamin talked about it elaborately in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". He stated, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element; its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (Benjamin, 3). Another effect of commodification is the depthlessness of the meaning. People often get the surface meaning instead of the actual or deep meaning. Therefore, commodification of culture might be a matter of fruitfulness to the capitalist leaders but it is a matter of concern and displeasure to the cultural critics.

Chapter 3

Review of Literature

In this section, I will be referring to those books and scholarly articles that are relevant to the area of my research. It will document the state of the art with respect to the topic I am writing about. In doing so, a brief summary of the prior researches will be given and how it is linked to my thesis will also be stated.

3.1 A Brief Introduction

To point out, my research requires a look back to the beginning of Bengali literature, then a particular focus on the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah and its similarities with Western philosophers. By doing this, I will try to reveal Lalon's actual value as a social reformer and philosopher.

3.2 Charyapada

In the quest of gathering information about 'Charyapada', Atindra Majumdar's book *Charyapada: A Treatise on Earliest Bengali Buddhist Mystic Songs*, has been significantly resourceful. The book was enough to know about Charyapada as it contains detailed research and analysis of it. Dr. Gyan Ratna Mahathera's article "Charyapada: The Original Source of Bengali Literature" provides us with a short and simple resource on Charyapada. In addition to that, Banglapedia was another source that provided necessary information regarding Charyapada.

To begin with, Charyapada is a collection of 8th-12th century mystical poems written by people who practiced the Sahajia cult of Buddhism that evolved in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and other northeastern states. It is considered as the original source of Bengali literature. As Dr. Mahathera asserts, "Most of the linguistic scholars expressed their idea that

Charyapada is the pioneer and original source of Bengali lyrics. It's the planet Venus in the realm of Bengali poetry" (Mahathera). There are as many as 50 to 51 songs but we got only 46 and a torn one of them composed by 22 poet-philosophers. Composed by various Buddhist seer-poets, these mystic songs project on the experiences of us in our enlightened states. Luipada, Kanhapada, Kukkuripada, Bhusukupada, Kamlipada are the names of few of those poets. "The Charyapada hymns possess both linguistic and literary value. The Siddhacharya, or composers of the Charyapada hymns, include Luipa, Bhusukupada, Kanhnapa and Savarpa" (Banglapedia). Charyapada and these spiritual hymns are the only existing sources related to the origin of Bengali literature. After staying undiscovered for centuries, it was discovered by Haraprasad Shastri in the 19th century, as Mahathera states "The famous Bengali linguist Haraprasad Shastri discovered the palm leaf Charyapada manuscript in the Nepal Royal Court Library in 1907" (Mahathera). Since then, scholars started to decipher the ancient language of Charyapada into modern language. Unfortunately, there are not many institutions, scholars and resources available in our country for this kind of research. In the midst of all this, the recent publication of the English translation of Charyapada, the *Mystic Poetry of Bangladesh* came as a blessing. This collection contains the translation of the Charya verses in English. "Hasna Jasimuddin Moudud, who herself translated the verses, said she visited Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia and Tibet to see the manuscripts" (The Daily Star, 1 Apr 2017).

Charyapada talked about worldly ties, good conducts, good living and influence of religion in human life. Bengali poet and researcher Atindra Majumdar states in his book, "It can be seen by analyzing all the songs of Charyapada that, almost every song speaks of some religious lesson and methods of religious meditation" (Majumdar, 55, my translation). The language of Charyapada was full of symbolism and metaphor. The saint composers of Charyapada took the elements of nature as their main source of writing. "Soil, tree, branches,

flower, sky, river, river's wave, boat, ghat, ferryman, jungle, deer, mouse, axe, plate. gold-silver, Brahmin caste- everything was used as symbols and metaphors to describe spiritual aspects in Charyapada” (Majumdar, 55, My translation). Produced below is English translation of the first verse of Charyapada. It was composed by Buddhist Siddhacharya poet Luipada and translated by Hasna Jasimuddin Moudud.

“The body is like the finest tree, with five branches.

Darkness enters the restless mind.

Strengthen the quantity of Great Bliss, says Luyi.

Learn from asking the Guru.

Why does one meditate?

Surely one dies of happiness or unhappiness.

Set aside binding and fastening in false hope.

Embrace the wings of the Void.

Luyi says: I have seen this in meditation.

Inhalation and exhalation are seated on two stools” (Moudud, 3).

Provided that, Charyapada marks as the origin of our beloved literature and its influence continued to be seen in the following events such as Sahajiyana, Bauliana and even in all the poets of Bengal. “The Charyapada firstly was introduced as the principle melody of Bengali poetry thousand years ago. For that reason, the Charyapada is the shining star that first appeared at the dawn of Bengali poetics and still now shines bright. Its light is peaceful, charming and glorified in the unbounded sky of Bengali poetics” (Majumdar, 115, My translation).

3.3 “Deho-Totto” or The Concept of Body and Soul

We need to know about Deho-Totto because it will connect us with the next significant phase of Charyapada, which is Sahajiya, from which the Baul movement initially

originated. An essay called, “Soma Sema: The Body as a Prison for the Soul” by Christian Irigaray and English professor Warren Montag’s article, “The Soul Is the Prison of the Body: Althusser and Foucault, 1970-175” helped me to learn about this concept. In addition to that, the translated version of Plato’s *Phaedo* by Benjamin Jowett provided necessary help.

In the first place, the concept of **Deho-totto** or body and soul originated a long time ago. It takes us back to the time of Aristotle and Plato. They considered the body as a prison to the soul of human. “Every soul beheld true Being; this was the condition of her passing into the form of man” (Plato). Plato regarded our soul as truly divine and far more real than the physical body. The soul is trapped inside the material body and collaborating with its own imprisonment because it does not understand how it could get out of this and making its condition worse. “...being permitted as initiates to the sight of perfect and simple and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light, being ourselves pure and not embodied in this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell” (Plato). According to him, the soul’s divine transcendent world is foreign and remote from the earthly world perceived with human senses. The soul preexisted in the world where only eternal forms and souls exist. In Plato’s *Republic*, we are introduced to the “Allegory of The Cave”. In it he describes the plight of a prisoner held captive in a deep cave, trying to make sense of the outside world by the only thing he sees- the dancing shadows on the cave walls. Christian Irigaray, a historian and writer talked about this in the essay, “Soma Sema: The Body as a Prison for the Soul”. She states, “In Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, the soul ascends and departs from the enclosure of the cavern and enters the outside world where the Sun is shining and things can be perceived in plain daylight. Thus the soul realizes, after its ascent into daylight, that the “reality” appreciated by most through pure sensorial awareness is nothing but a shadowy image of another True Reality or Edios” (Irigaray, 4). She tries to imply; one will be able to find the true reality only if he can free his

soul from the physical body. For Aristotle, the soul with the material body is an element of the structure of the human being. The human soul according to Aristotle became a perfect form that possessed the capacity to understand the outside world and the consciousness itself, forming the whole body. However, not everyone agreed with the stated views. There are many who stated the opposite as they believed that the soul is the prison of the body and some believed they both are dependent on each other. From Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza's account of the proto-disciplinary society, it may be concluded that there can be no liberation of the mind without a corresponding liberation of the body. Warren Montag, a professor of English literature discussed this in his article "The Soul is the Prison of the Body: Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975" where he talked about Spinoza's philosophy. "For him, the soul is in no way separate from the activity of the organic body; on the contrary, the soul only thinks insofar as it is affected by the impression and movements of the body, therefore it thinks not only with the body but in it, consubstantially united to it prior to any separation" (Montag). If we move a bit forward, we can see 16th century's metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell also wrote about body and soul in his poem "A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body". Here, he describes the conflict between the human body and the human soul, each attributing its troubles and sufferings to the other. The soul feels that it is a prisoner inside the body while the body feels that the soul is a tyrant imposing all kinds of restraints and restrictions upon the body.

Moving ahead, we will see how this concept of Body and Soul remained imprinted in the subsequent movements of Bengali culture and Lalon Shah's philosophy. This philosophy still remains as a subject of interest to many poets, writers and intellectuals.

3.4 Hindu Tantric Literature and Vaishnava-Sahajiya

Now, let us come back to Bengali literature. Before talking about **Sahajiyana**, we need to know a couple of things. For **Hindu Tantric Literature** and **Vaishnava-Sahajiya**, I went through Tenu Goudriaan and Gupta Sanjukta's "Hindu Tantric and Shakta Literature". Additionally, Kaustav Kundu's article "Shakto Literature and the 'Durga-Kali' Paradigm: Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya's "the Goddess" as Satyajit Ray's Devi".

Hindu Tantric Literature or the genre of religious literature known as Tantra exists in all traditional South Asian religions- Hinduism, Buddhism, and folk beliefs. The Hindu Tantras are also divided into Saiva, Sakta, and Vaisnava. The literature classed as Tantra is not a coherent group of texts, nor are the texts always comprised of any homogenous materials. There is no regularity in these divisions and therefore, Tantric literature must be defined as a theistic literature mainly focused on the cult of one or several deities. **Vaishnavism** is one of the major traditions within the broader Vedic, or Hindu spiritual culture. Unlike some Vedic traditions, Vaishnavas believe that the ultimate reality is personal and God is supreme, an all-attractive person, or Krishna. They acknowledge that all living beings are eternal persons, and that all life's problems are rooted in the individual soul's forgetfulness of his or her relationship with God. **Vaishnava-Sahajiya** is a form of Tantric Vaishnavism that centered in Bengal, India. They sought religious experience through the five senses which included human coupling and sexual love. Sahaja ('easy' or 'natural') as a system of worship was prevalent in the Tantric traditions common to both Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengal. The tradition used the romance between Krishna and Radha as a metaphor for union with God, and sought to experience that union through its physical reenactment. Having said that, Tenu Goudriaan and Gupta Sanjukta asserts in their article that, "from the middle of 18th century, a new custom of worshiping Kali publicly with great pomp provoked the Vaishnavas and caused serious sectarian conflict between them and the Saktas. The Tantric poet-philosophers tried to remove the cause of these conflicts by

preaching the doctrine of one transcendent Personal Deity who is sometimes a woman, the Goddess, and sometimes a man (Purusa), Krishna, Visu or Siva.” (Goudriaan, Gupta). The new concept is clearly presented in a song by Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, who lived in the last quarter of that century:

O my mind, don't you know that Kali, the supreme source, is not just a girl?
 Sometimes, adopting the color of the clouds, She appears as a man.
 Again, disheveled, sword in hand, she frightens the sons of Danu
 Sometimes, descending in Braja, the same One steals the hearts of the milkmaids.

“Kali, the cosmic deity, is not confined to a single sex. As the warrior Goddess She controls the demons (Danu's sons), and as the playful Krishna the same Divinity bestows grace on the milkmaids” (Goudriaan, Gupta). Since then, various writers prioritized a coalescence between Durga and Kali, the two goddesses. Indian researcher Kaustav Kundu exemplifies this in his article “Shakto Literature and the ‘Durga-Kali’ Paradigm: Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya's “the Goddess” as Satyajit Ray's Devi”. He states, “Although the heartening form of Durga and the formidable vision of Kali may offer a startling contrast, they are a single manifestation of the important concept in Indian religion known as Shakti, Women Power. In Satyajit Ray's 1960 film *Devi*, the goddess appears in this dual epiphany as Durga-Kali” (Kundu, 43).

From the discussion, we can notice that the concept of body and soul remained intact throughout the history but the philosophies or perspectives around it changed gradually. At the beginning, it was all about human and true reality, then it took a religious form. Followers of different religions started to use literature to form their beliefs and God became a prominent subject of **Deho-totto**.

3.5 Sahajiyana

Collecting information on **Sahajiya** and then compiling them into an abstract was not an easy task as there are many interpretations of this cult. However, an expert on **Sahaja** studies Professor Sri Paritosh Das's book *Sahajiya Cult of Bengal And Panca Sakha Cult of Orissa* and Banglapedia served as my primary sources.

The literal translation of the word **Sahaj** is 'simple' or 'ease' but its original and theoretical meaning is very deep and meditative. The followers of **Sahajia** believed in the sahaj or simple way to feel the innate reality that is present in every animate or inanimate object. **Sahajiya** taught one to renounce worldly ties. During the Pala dynasty, Buddhist Sahajiya emerged as a religious doctrine and its followers were known as Siddhacharya and famous Siddhacharya include Luipa, Bhusukpa, Shantipa who composed the Buddhist songs and distiches of the Charyapada. According to professor Paritosh Das, it was believed that, "it is not necessary to bow down before the images of gods which are made of wood, stone or mud; but the worshipper should, with concentration, offer worship only to own body where all gods reside. A new doctrine, one's own body, in which the whole world is manifest, was developed amongst the Sahajayans" (Das, 30). So, it was more of a religious cult and it kept the touch of **Deho-totto** and **Charyapada**. As described in Banglapedia, "According to Sahajiya philosophy, along with an external form, every object also has an internal form. This internal form is eternal, otherwise known as sahana. To feel the sahana is to feel the internal eternity in one's self" (Banglapedia). In this manner, it talks about the rights and wrongs, spiritual and philosophical aspects of life, as **Charyapada** did. Additionally, it talks about the 'sahaj' life and the importance of knowing oneself to the fullest and explains that it is the only way one will be able to find ultimate peace on earth.

Professor Paritosh Das's book on **Sahajiyana** was significantly conducive for my research. The book provides more than just background history and information on **Sahajia**. While he provided sufficient information about **Sahajia**, Das hailed the philosophy to a

higher value which it deserves. “The lyrics of the Sahajiyas reality reached a high pitch of poetry and philosophy, and these songs assigned a sublime value to human love” (Das, 1). Most importantly, he brought up the issue about the philosophy not getting its deserved place in history. It can be said that, due to its strong sexual tantric practices, it was perceived with disdain by other religious communities. As a result, a necessity of privacy and secrecy arose and on account of negligence, the **Sahajia** culture is on the verge of extinction. “As a result, it [**Sahajiyana**] does not find a proper place in Indian philosophy, though this religious culture was once held in high esteem as embodying the secret wisdom of the Sahajiya-Sadhakas. It has been degraded to one of the obscure religious cults of Bengal” (Das, 1). In addition to that, he also mentioned the fact that, for being a religious cult or philosophy of the lower class, “it did not attract the attention of the modern elite persons” (Das, 1). His views go in line with my views regarding class distinction and consumption of art based on class identities.

3.6 Bauliana

Fortunately, I found a number of resources regarding Baul movement or Bauliana and folk culture. Following is the list of the resources I read and chose to include in my thesis. Researcher Gopal Chandra Sarkar’s book *Lokdhormo O Motua Shomproday: Ekti Samajtantrik Somikkha*, Anirban Mondal’s article “Searching for Moner Manush (Man of Heart): Bauls of Bengal and Fakir Lalon Shah”, Sayantan Thakur’s article “Evolution of Folk Songs of Twentieth Century Bengal”, Begum Shamsad Chowdhury’s “Mysticism in the Songs of Bangladeshi Baul Singer- Khabiruddin Dewan”, Haroonuzzaman’s article “Lalon the mystic poet, and his songs”, and *Bauliana: Worshiping Great God in Man*, a book by Maqsoodul Haque,

The real meaning of the word ‘Fakir’ is something very different than beggars. Real Fakirs are people who have no worldly connections; no desire for accommodation, no worry for family or food. They were people who used to live in their own spiritual worlds. The Bauls are an extension of the **Sahajiya** philosophy. The Fakirs as well as some Bauls initiated into the **Sahajiya** would shave their heads and keep on practicing and believing in many of basic creeds of Vaishnava- Sahajiya. Talking about the origin of Bauliana, researcher Gopal Chandra Sarkar asserts, “Baul doctrine was created from the combination of both Sufism and Vaishnavism” (Sarkar, 40). Like the Sufi, the Baul searches for the divine beloved and finds Him housed in the human body. They were always in the hunt for knowledge and realizing oneself and God. In the article “Lalon the mystic poet, and his songs”, author Haroonuzzaman states, “All Bauls hold the view that God is hidden in the heart of man, and no ritual of any organized religion will help man to find Him there” (Haroonuzzaman). The mystic philosophies of the Bauls include the “Deho-totto”, the symbolism of body being the seat of the events of human life and its rituals. In the essay, “Mysticism in the Songs of Bangladeshi Baul (Mystic) Singer-Khabiruddin Dewan”, researcher Shamsad Begum Chowdhury tried to show the countrywide popularity of this type of songs and its influence on mass people. She describes, “In Baul songs there are some sects like- *Attototto*, *Dehototto*, *Gurutotto*, *Premtotto*, *Srishitotto* etc. which are also found in the mystic songs like *Murshidi* songs, *Fakir* songs and *Bichar* songs. Individuality has been created in the language and lyrics of these songs according to and on the basis of regional and spiritual aim” (Chowdhury and Das). The music of Baul minstrel tries to focus on the importance of the human soul or the ‘Moner Manush’ which they perceive to be nothing less than the true God within us. Furthermore, Maqsoodul Haque’s book on **Bauliana**, is a brilliant work which is not merely about music but it is a discussion of philosophy and a guide to living. He clearly points out Lalon Shah repudiated affiliation to any organized religion and the concept of **Bauliana** as

practiced by him was less a religion but more a quest for the “omnipotent maker through introspection” (Haque, 11). The book has developed out of Maqsood’s close association with the Bauls and is obviously autobiographical in nature. He also asserts the cultural value of Baul songs and its fading state. He says, “Being an oral tradition, Baul music ironically is also one of our near extinct heritages as most of the works have either disappeared or have been claimed by unscrupulous people over time” (Haque, 7). Sayantan Thakur also starts his article by stating the cultural significance of Baul and folk songs. He writes:

“Folk songs has been bearing the cultural essence of Bengal for ages. It has always been the subject of attraction for one who does have the power to appreciate the enriched essence of music. Its ‘sahajiya’ (simple) tune can not only attract a man but also can steal his heart away from the mundane complexities of this world of transition. But apart from its heart rendering appeal, Bengali folk song also gets importance because of its ability to touch and represent every sphere of Bengali society” (Thakur, 21).

3.7 Fakir Lalon Shah

Fakir Lalon Shah was born in the year 1774 (arguably) in the village Harishpur, under the present district of Jhenaidah in Bangladesh. He is considered as one of the greatest mystic poets of this sub-continent. “Fakir Lalon Shah is the main pioneer and the greatest spokesperson of the marginalized Baul tradition of the undivided Bengal” (Mondal, 59). There are numerous articles online and few books available on Lalon, but almost all of them talk about his life and philosophy. Rarely anyone does a comparative study of his philosophy with Western philosophies. Amongst several materials, selected few will be reviewed below.

“Searching for Moner Manush (Man of Heart): Bauls of Bengal and Fakir Lalon Shah”: This article by Anirban Mondal, was published in the *Journal of Bengali Studies*. In this article, he

speaks about Baul tradition and Fakir Lalon Shah with concentration on the concept of ‘Moner Manush’ or the Man of Heart. Lalon Shah is unique in that he blended different traditions of devotional rites such as **Sahajia** of Buddhism, **Sahajia** of Vaishnavism, **Sufism** of Islam and thereby interpreted **Deho-totto** in his own way. “Rejecting the religious institutions and their dogma, Fakir Lalon Shah has created a world which is based on human and humanity. This multifaceted personality was a socially concerned Baul, and then society’s problem had touched him deeply. So through his songs he raised his voice against class, caste, religious malice and so many social issues which we can still observe in our Pan-Indian society” (Mondal, 59). Throughout his life, he kept searching the ‘Moner Manush’ also known as ‘Sahaj Manush’. Fakir Lalon said, “Try to understand a shohoj man”- a moner manush or man of the heart. A sahaj person means the person in my heart, the man within me or the creative principle within you. It is believed that, to make a connection with the wise or gifted one, the Guru and eventually with God, each human being is expected to be a ‘shohoj manush’ or simple being devoid of complexities and pretensions of materialism. As we have already seen, this was the main essence of earlier cultural movements, **Sahajiyana** and **Bauliana**. “Fakir Lalon Shah used to keep himself engaged in gathering knowledge from within and in search of ‘Moner Manush’ or ‘Sahaj Manush’ or ‘Achin Manush’” (Mondal, 59). Anirban emphasized on this by stating, “... it is worth adding that Rabindranath Tagore himself admitted that the song ‘Achin Pakhi’ by Lalon was the inspiration behind his concept of Jivandevata” (Mondal, 59). He added another important aspect to his writing which is, the contribution of Lalon’s philosophy in our culture and literature. “The main contribution of Lalon Shah is that; he has given a lower class’s folk-religion songs the height of literature. The voice of Fakir Lalon Shah, his songs and philosophy are now not limited only within Bengal and Bengali speaking areas, but have spread all over the world” (Mondal, 59).

“On Lalon: ‘Divinity’ is Political”: This is the title of an interview of Farhad Mazhar, a renowned Bangladeshi poet and Lalon researcher, taken by DEPART, a journal publisher. In this interview, Farhad answers five questions regarding Lalon’s philosophy and his comparison with European philosophies. He asserts that, the dominant philosophical quest of Bauls has been ethico-political, because of the profound influence of Jain, Buddhists and Sankhya philosophy in Bengal. “The quest for epistemological certainty, or searching and representing truth as something we surely know and are capable to represent in sign system, is very much Greco-Christian in origin and consequently a problem of modernity” (Mazhar). He claims that, all the epistemic categories like existence, time and eternity “are very much Western”. But in Bengal’s philosophical discourse, the concern of certainty is absent. Markedly, he warns us to stop believing everything we see or hear about Lalon in this modern age. The main reason of this is the distortion of his philosophy or knowledge that has been going on since many years. “This is extremely important to know that Lalon was never an ‘addhatik’, a ‘spiritual guru’ as we generally understand in ‘New Age’ cult practices” (Mazhar). He argues to take Lalon’s philosophy in a simple manner as it is nothing too complex or over the top. Lastly, I would like to quote the answer he gave when he was asked the following question, “How philosophical was he compared to what was going on in Europe?” Mazhar answered, “You are asking a question that should become a book or a theme of a dissertation. Our academic environment is very poor. Philosophy departments are very weak. Urban middle class has no idea about the massive materials on philosophy in Bengal’s oral culture” (Mazhar). He pointed out the major reasons for the created gaps in Bengali literary history, institutional education and the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah as Mazhar indicates to poor academic environment of Bangladesh. Additionally, he mentioned the ignorant state of the Urban middle class towards the philosophies of rural class. Although

he decided not to give any proper answer to the question, this paper will try to give an elaborated answer to that question.

“Mystic Songs and Love Lyrics of Lalon and Donne: A Comparative Study”: This article is written by Md. Hafijur Rahman and Md. Iqbal Hosain. In this paper, they did a comparative study between 16th century metaphysical poet John Donne and Fakir Lalon Shah. Donne and Lalon Shah are two distinguished figures geographically but they share many things in common like the themes of love, religion, faith, soul and God. As far as metaphysical poetry is concerned, they tried to show that not only Donne but Lalon was also a metaphysical poet. Talking about Metaphysical poetry, it was 17th century’s highly intellectualized genre of poetry which “chiefly deals with some abstract ideas or concepts like death, religion, faith, God, soul, love and the like which do not have any concrete shape” (Rahman and Hosain, 167). Donne and Lalon, both dwelt in these themes through their poems or songs. “Lalon’s powerful ‘metaphysical’ lyrics are astoundingly dominating in the superfluity of modern market-oriented culture and commercialization of music” (Rahman and Hosain, 166). As we have already seen, Lalon’s prime focus was on what life actually is, the nature and function of human body and soul, the relation between God and human beings etc. He urges to us to understand the full potential of our body and soul, and then make union with God. On the other hand, Donne initially focused on writing love poems but for him, love was not about body and soul only, it was about body and soul working together in tandem. To illustrate, I am quoting from the article. “Like great metaphysical poets, comparing human soul to a mirror city where God dwells in, Lalon says:

বাড়ীর কাছে আরশী নগর
সেথায় এক পড়শি বসত করে,
আমি একদিনও না দেখিলাম তারে।

English translation:

So near is Arshinagar

There lives a neighbor,

Not a single day I could see him. (Rahman and Hosain, 171)

Similarly, Donne wishes to see God as he “with all his sins, disqualification and infidelity aspires in a holy and happy union with God. In his Holy Sonnet no. 14 he compares his soul to a city which has been usurped by the evil, God’s enemy. He passionately pleases to god to better, overthrow, bend, break, blow, burn, divorce, untie, imprison, enthrall and ravish him to take possession of his heart. He loves God dearly and wants to be loved in return” (Rahman and Hosain, 172).

I, like an usurp’d town, to another due,

Labor to admit you, but O, to no end.

.....

Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,

Take me to you, imprison me, for I, (Donne).

Thus, the article brings up a comparative study of Lalon with a Western poet and does a great justice to our philosopher by upholding his value as a literary figure.

Chapter 4

Lalon Shah Alongside Western Philosophers

In this chapter, I will thoroughly analyze Lalon's philosophy in comparison with Western philosophers, the reasons of the created gap in our history and its absence in our educational system and the present condition of Lalon culture in our country.

4.1 Lalon's Belief About Body and Soul

We already got acquainted with the concept of **Deho-totto** or the body and the soul in the 3rd chapter. We have seen how this concept originated from the era of Aristotle and Plato as they both talked about it and considered human body as the prison or cage to the soul. We do not understand how our soul works but we wish we could. I have also mentioned Andrew Marvell's poem "A Dialogue Between the Soul and body" where the soul and the body are separate entities and each attributing its troubles and sufferings to the other. As an illustration, the soul feels that it is a prisoner inside the body, fanning body as a cage:

O who shall, from this dungeon, raise
A soul enslav'd so many ways?
With bolts of bones, that fetter'd stands
In feet, and manacled in hands; (Marvell)

Having said that, Fakir Lalon often imprinted this concept of body and soul in his songs where he ascribed body as a cage where the soul lives. In the song, "Khacar Vitor Achin Pakhi", this concept is clearly presented. Here, he symbolizes the soul by a bird and the body by a cage. He wishes to catch the bird but he fails as the strange bird moves quite strangely. He wants to understand and grasp the essence of our soul just like the philosophers mentioned above did. In order to illustrate, few lines from the song is given below:

“খাঁচার ভিতর অচিন পাখি
 কেমনে আসে যায়।
 তারে ধরতে পারলে মনোবেড়ি
 দিতাম পাখির পায়।।”

English translation:

“How does the unknown bird
 flit in and out of the cage
 If I could catch the bird
 I would put it under the fetters of my heart” (Lalon)

4.2 Mysticism in Lalon Shah and John Donne’s Work

Although I have discussed this in chapter 3, I thought it is worth mentioning again. In that comparative study by Md. Hafijur Rahman and Md. Iqbal Hosain, we have seen how both Lalon and Donne dealt with same themes in their works. Donne was famous for his use of mysticism in his poems. Mysticism is a faith that directs knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality which can be achieved through subjective intuition. In other words, it is the spirituality of direct union with and experience of God or the Absolute. Both Lalon and Donne longed for this union and searched God through their songs and poems. “Lalon’s songs and Donne’s ‘Holly Sonnets’ bear the traits of mysticism” (Rahman and Hosain, 169). While, the mysticism of Donne is widely read and clearly investigated, in Lalon’s case it is not the same because his songs mostly passed down from his disciple to disciple orally and were mostly unwritten. One of the brilliant features of Lalon and Donne’s mystic songs is the use of conceits. A conceit is a simile or a comparison between two farfetched or dissimilar objects. Both of the intellectuals used conceits frequently in their lyrics which portrayed themes like love, death, soul, God. To illustrate this, let us have a look at the following lyrics.

“If they be two, they are two so
As stiff compasses are two”. (Donne)

The lines are taken from Donne’s poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” where he compares two lovers with the legs of a compass. This comparison is weirdly exaggerated and at the same time pleasant. Similarly, in Lalon’s case, if we take the song mentioned on the previous page “Khachar Vitor Achin Pakhi”, it is noticeable how he compares the human soul to an unknown bird and human body with a cage. This soul-bird conceit is evident in many of Lalon’s songs like “Pakhi Kokhon Jani Ura Jay” and “Chirodin Kacha Basher Khacha Thakbe Na”.

“পাখি কখন জানি উড়ে যায়
একটা বদ হাওয়া লেগে খাচায়
খাঁচার আড়া পড়ল ধ্বসে
পাখি আর দাঁড়াবে কিসে।”

English translation:

“As an ill-wind blows
I fear when the bird flies out
The crossbeam of the cage collapses
Where will the bird stand?” (Lalon)

Here, Lalon expresses his fear that if the bird (soul) flies away from its cage (body), and loses its ground to stand, then our life will meet a sad end, which basically refers to death. In this manner, both Lalon and Donne share significant similarities between their philosophy. Notably, both of them had Renaissance revolutionary idealism in their attitudes but Donne was greatly influenced by the Renaissance idealism consciously while Lalon possessed its spirits without having any idea of the movement.

4.3 Fakir Lalon: A Great Symbolist

When we hail any poet for the use of conceit, it is almost a given that that poet would be a great symbolist too. To tell the truth, Lalon excelled in using many forms of symbolism. His songs were full of allegory, conceit, metaphor and simile. Symbolism is being used almost since classical era. Different symbols mean different things while same symbols can also mean different things, depending on the context and culture it was used in. French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) is arguably considered as the founder of French symbolism and known for his great influence on modernity in literature. His poems were all rounded in the symbolist sense and through them he depicted the harsh, revolting realities of human experience. You can take any of his poems and find use of symbolism at its best. Likewise, a lot of Lalon's songs contain symbolism which evokes interest in listeners as they find an opportunity to get an insight into the lyricist's mind on how he views the world and how he thinks of common objects. Let us do a close-reading on the works of Baudelaire and Lalon Shah.

“Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,

Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.

There are perfumes as cool as children's flesh,

Like fiddles, sweet, like meadows greenly fresh.

And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant” (Correspondences)

In this poem, sound becomes a symbol of color; perfumes evoke sights; color reveals emotion. The senses not only correspond with each other but also bear a moral influence in the direction of either purity or corruption. He personifies the nature and its main elements which are sounds, colors, and perfumes. This poem is a succinct expression of his symbolic aesthetic, seeing the material world as a forest of symbols pointing to an ideal world.

Compared to Baudelaire's "Correspondences" Lalon's one of the most popular song "Arshinagar" represents his use of symbolism which deserves critical attention.

বাড়ীর কাছে আরশী নগর
সেথায় এক পড়শি বসত করে,
আমি একদিনও না দেখিলাম তারে।

English translation: So near of my home is mirror-city
There lives a neighbor,
Not a single day I could see him.

Here, the words 'home', 'mirror-city', 'neighbor' are all symbolic as they respectively refer to 'heart' or 'soul', 'reflection of the soul', and 'God' or the 'Man of heart'. Lalon implies, that the man-of-heart or God resides within ourselves yet we fail to see him. In another song, Lalon symbolizes the angel of death with a fisherman, death with the net of the fisherman and all human beings with fish. He says:

"জাল ফেলে মাছ ধরবে যখন।
কাতলা পোনা চুনো-চানা
কেউ বাকি থাকবে না তখন।।
আসছে শমন জেলে,
খেপলা ফেলে করবে তুলে খালুই পুরণ।।"

English translation: "When the net is cast
All fishes will be caught
The salmon and the shrimps
Soon the summon will come
And all the excitement end".

The song is clearly religious in tone which talks about the mortality of human being. Death is inevitable for all of us and when it will come, all the worldly excitements and pleasures will come to an end. Interestingly, Lalon symbolizes the rich class by Salmon fish

and the poor by shrimps. No matter what class, everyone has to taste death. This shows the richness of Lalon's literary skill.

In addition to that, Lalon's religiosity and symbolism remind us of another great English poet, William Blake (1757-1827). He is considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. Just like Lalon, Blake was also a religious seeker but not a joiner and believer in conventional religious methods. But Blake often held a pessimistic view about God whereas Lalon was in favor of God. Keeping this difference aside, Blake loved the world of the spirit and abominated institutionalized religion, especially when it was allied with government. Moving ahead, as we have just seen how Lalon symbolized human beings with fish and death with a net, Blake's poem "Ah Sunflower" goes symbolic in the like manner. He writes:

"Ah Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveler's journey is done."

Blake uses a 'sunflower' as a symbol for human beings, and 'the sun' symbolizes life. These lines symbolically refer to their life cycle and their yearning for a never-ending life.

Furthermore, speaking of his religious aspect, Blake believed that God is within us and there are divine qualities in everyone. In his book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he states, "God only Acts, and is, in existing beings or Men" (Blake). This is what Lalon also believed and was his main motto, which is evident in many of his songs. Man and humanity was the first and foremost concern in the songs of Lalon. As Anirban Mondal asserts, "To Lalon, 'man' is the main concern and man's heart is the only place where God resides whom Lalon calls as Moner Manush" (Mondal, 1). In one of his songs, he says:

“ডুবে দেখ দেখি মনে কিরূপ লীলাময়,
আকাশ-পাতাল খুঁজিস যারে এই দেহে সে রয়।”

English translation: “Dive in your heart and see how attitudinizing it is

Whom you are searching here and there, He resides in your body”

This means if we think deeply the existence of the God or the source of eternal bliss, we need not roam here and there because, it resides in our body. In this way, Lalon shared similarities in philosophy and literary techniques with Western philosophers, Charles Baudelaire and William Blake.

4.4 Lalon Shah’s Belief in Individuality, as a Transcendentalist

Fakir Lalon Shah believed that all logic and understanding lies within oneself and life is the path towards realizing them. It takes us way back to the father of philosophy, Socrates, who stated, “Thy knows”, which literally means “know yourself”. Socrates believed in individuality and urged people to examine their lives because unexamined life is not worth living. Over the years, many intellectuals believed in this and used this philosophy in their works and here, we are talking about Lalon Shah, an uneducated rural mystic poet, who also put confidence in this belief. He strongly believed in all people, regardless of sex, caste, religion, to be equal; and this belief is known as “Manob Dhormo”. He said, “Try to understand a Shohoj Manush”- a ‘Moner Manush’ or the Man of Heart. As discussed earlier, the literal translation of ‘Shohoj’ is ‘simple’ or ‘ease’ but for the Bauls, it stands for a divine way of life through which the union with God will become achievable. According to Lalon, a ‘Shohoj Manush’ means the person in my heart, the man within me or the creative principle within myself. In other words, a simple being devoid of complexities and pretensions of materialism. Fakir Lalon explains the search in this verse:

“সহজ মানুষ ভজে দেখনারে মন / দিব্যজ্ঞানে,
পাবিরে অমূল্য নিধি বর্তমানে”

English translation by me: “Look for the simple being, in your deepest contemplation,
And you will find priceless gems in the present”.

Furthermore, the search for ‘Moner Manush’ can be noticed in this verse:

“মিলন হবে কতদিনে
আমার মনের মানুষের সনে”

English translation: “When there shall be meeting?
With the person of my heart!”

In this way, the aim of Lalon Shah and the Bauls was to propound transcendental truths in song format, travelling from village to village proclaiming that there is no such thing as Hindu, Muslim or Christian, only ‘Moner Manush’ and we all are same. By emphasizing on this equality, Lalon Shah through his songs encouraged individualism and spirituality.

In like manner, the followers of the philosophy ‘Transcendentalism’ also believed in God, divinity and power of individuality. Transcendentalism was found in the 19th century American literature and philosophy but initially it started in the 18th century, as a European thought and philosophy. Transcendentalists believed there is an ideal spiritual state which transcends the physical and empirical. One of the greatest fiction writers in American literature and a notable transcendentalist Nathaniel Hawthorne states in the short story “Rappaccinis Daughter” that, “There is something truer and more real, than what we can see with the eyes, and touch with the fingers” (16). It means to transcend, to go beyond. They rejected the idea that all knowledge come to the mind through the senses. They believed, truth transcends the senses and it cannot be found by observation alone. Transcendentalism heavily emphasize the power of God as the center of universe and the power of conscience. The father of transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his poem “The Rhodora” talks about the speaker’s visit to rhodora bush; he compliments its beauty and contemplates his own presence and the bush’s presence. He finishes the poem by saying:

“Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!
 I never thought to ask; I never knew;
 But in my simple ignorance suppose
 The self-same power that brought me there, brought you”

God who created both human and nature, even that particular rhodora bush, compels the speaker to the flower. Each individual is drawn towards nature, and by placing himself there the speaker can truly begin to understand life and divinity. Furthermore, the transcendentalists believed that if one can use his intuition and listen to his conscience, he can achieve the self-containment of the soul; and it will lead him to find the real truth and sublime peace. So, one has to know himself and look inside first. Only then, he can connect with God. Just as Fakir Lalon and the Bauls emphasized on knowing ourselves and search for the truth inside of us, transcendentalists also talked about it. Emdadul Haque, a Bangladeshi researcher talked about Lalon’s comparative aspect with Western philosopher. He affirms, “Fakir Lalon Shah: A prominent Bengali philosopher, mystic and an icon of Bengali literature “The great humanist Lalon was the upholder of English poet Coleridge’s doctrine of universal love. He either believed that he Prayeth best who loveth best, which corresponds to Coleridge. There’s no denying the fact that all his life, he cherished the dream prosperity of his mind, he has strived to comprehend the transience of human life, human beings’ subservience and submission to Almighty and His sweet will” (Haque, 45).

Thus, Fakir Lalon also contains the traits of a Transcendentalist who expressly celebrated Humanism and Individualism. With this intention, it shows that, literature may have different language, people may belong to different countries, but the minds of philosophers, writers or thinkers; do connect with each other regardless language, ethnicity, race or nation.

Chapter 5

Why Lalon Became “The Lost Philosopher”?

Today, Fakir Lalon Shah is alive through music. We listen to his songs and get to know his name from there and appreciate the lyricist. But is this the only designation he deserves? From everything we have read so far, everything I have brought up in this paper, I believe he deserves a remarked place in our cultural, literary history and educational system. Apart from listening to his songs, we hardly know anything about him and his philosophy because he does not have the place in our history that he deserves. That is why I called him ‘The Lost Philosopher’. There are several reasons for this created gap in our history and academic system. In this section, I will talk about those issues elaborately.

5.1 The Class Distinction

Belonging to the tradition-bound community of Bengal, the Bauls bear a rich cultural heritage of the country yet they are not counted as a part of high culture. Based on the discussion preciously held on “Cultural Theory”, we tag Baul culture to the region of folk or popular culture. Folklore is considered as the heart of Bangladeshi culture and heritage. Folk’ means people and ‘Lore’ means unwritten stories, proverbs, riddles, and songs of a culture. So, it is clear that folklore is the creation of people’s artistic mind. Folklore has significant contribution on Bengali literature, custom and legacy. Fakir Lalon, the most prominent figure in the Baul tradition or folk culture, attracted widespread attention for his mystical approach to humanism. His philosophy of spirituality became the core of Bengali culture, specifically rural culture; and this is where the distinction was born. Arguably, the fact of rural consumption was the reason why the Baul culture or Lalon culture is not regarded as high culture. As the definition of high culture addresses to the elite class, people of rural areas hardly falls under this class and as a consequence, their practices remain as products of either

low or popular culture. As stated in chapter 2, under “Marxist Criticism: Class Distinction”; with the passing of Industrialization and rising Capitalism, we witnessed the creation of Urbanization. As a result, the class division continued as the elite versus the poor and the urban versus the rural. The work or productivity of the middle class is looked down upon as gross whereas those of the upper class’ are appreciated. Although, it is the middle and lower class who do the productive work upon which the upper class build their fancy world. With the rise of urbanization, cities became the capital place, where commercialism reached its peak. Where industrial sectors and technology took room. Cities became the living places for the elite class and hub of economic power. Which resulted in more demand and supply of products in the Urban areas. Hence, the urban became the superior state while the rural stayed inferior. Thus, a hierarchy was created because it is not possible to have capitalism without standardization.

With regard to this, the cultural practices of Lalon and Baul, failed to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture because they were not part of the elite class and their culture was not practiced by many with high economic or educational background. The most substantial example of this would be Rabindranath Tagore. This noble laureate, romantic poet, song-writer, novelist, painter and great idealist, is a cultural icon and hero, to the South Asians. In an article published by Joseph O’Connell and Kathleen O’Connell, it is stated that, “For millions of Indians and Bangladeshis, Rabindranath Tagore is, as he was in his lifetime, a cultural icon”. (O’Connell, 961). As a member of Bengali elite class, he travelled many countries and gathered knowledge for his literary works. Tagore was mostly favorite to the higher class or educated Bengali-middle class during his time. Now, interestingly, while Tagore inspired many writers and intellectuals through his works, he himself was heavily inspired by Lalon Shah. As Emdadul Haque asserts, “The era of Bangla literature which was exclusively dominated by the Noble laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore,

had a notable contribution from another poet who is popularized as Fakir Lalon till today” (Haque,44). It is said, that Lalon often visited the zamindar family of Shilaidah and zamindar Jyotindranath Tagore (elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore) sketched Lalon’s portrait, which remains the only authentic document of Lalon’s visage. Here, he came into Rabindranath’s contact which opened up a new horizon for his career. Tagore’s concept of ‘Jibon Debota’ or Life God is alike to Lalon’s belief of ‘Moner Manush’ and the union with God. Here, Tagore defined man’s affinity with God through the allegory of human soul (Jib Atta) and heavenly soul or the Almighty (Param Atta). Furthermore, it is believed that, “it was Rabindranath who brought him (Lalon) to the lime light of the then enlightened stratum of the society by publishing twenty of his lyrics in the ‘Haramoni’ unit of the “Probashi”- a newspaper of Kolkata in the Bangla year 1932” (Haque,44). This statement is backed up in several articles, journals and interviews of both Lalon and Tagore experts. “Rabindranath Tagore was also inspired by his (Lalon’s) songs and published some of them in the monthly “Prabashi” of Kolkata” (Islam). Needless to say, prior to this step, unnoticed and undiscovered Lalon was walled within the compass of the rural folk.

With this in mind, we can assert the fact that, the class distinction, which Karl Marx frequently spoke of, played a pivotal role in shaping the culture of Lalon Shah. If he belonged to the elite class at that time, or lived in the urban, he might had come under the limelight at the first place. I have mentioned Paritosh Das’s book *Sahajiya Cult of Bengal And Panca Sakha Cult of Orissa* previously, where he implies that **Sahajiya** failed to gain attention of the modern elite persons because it was a philosophy obtained by the lower class people. He also states it is little known to the literate people of the modern age because “the educated community scarcely keeps contact with that class of people who live in the lower strata of the society” (Das, 1). Similarly, the actual value of Lalon's philosophy and culture are hitherto unknown to the literate class of the society. While, Rabindranath Tagore’s works are

recognized worldwide and comes under the tag of world literature, Lalon's philosophy does not even come under Bangla literature.

5.2 The Politics of History

We have just seen how the class distinction played a vital role in shaping cultural practices. This was an overall discussion on class conflict but in order to grasp the idea of politics in history of Bengal, we need a particular discussion on Bengal's upper and lower class formation. To begin with, let us take a look at this conflict framework:

Emerging Capitalism Vs Declining Feudalism

British East India Company + Trade and Business Vs Existing Aristocracy

Middle class Vs Upper Class

English + Locals Vs Turko-Afghan + Aristocracy

New Upper Class Vs Lower Class

Christianity Vs Local Faiths

European Philosophy Vs Local Philosophy

With the emerging capitalism, the British East India Company (BEIC) marked its place in Bengal. The British inaugurated the era of commercial capitalism and in this venture the British were supported by the local Indian Non-Bengali trading class. This trading class also brought the Zamindars in Bengal. Gradually, a Bengali Middle class raised which was opposed by the existing Muslim Upper class or the aristocrats. Successively, they were taken over by the Brits and a new upper class consisting of Local traders and Zamindars arose, and others remained as the members of the lower class. Thus, Bengal saw the formation of a new upper class and lower class. Moving ahead, with the establishment of commerce, they also

started to spread European philosophy in Bengal, which contrasted with local philosophies. Because of the supposed superiority of Western culture, as I have referred to Edward Said's *Orientalism* in chapter 2, the upper class Bengalis started to accept them to a certain extent. As a result, **Sahajiyana**, Baul movement, Lalon culture all these remained unnoticed and suppressed as they belonged to the lower class. The Europeans established their philosophy and culture here, and wrote our history from their perspectives. Given these points, the Europeans came over here, dominated us, wrote our history and erased us from our history. Speaking of contemporary time, the European influence on Bengal laid so strong that the rulers have been replaced, new rulers came but the ruling strategy remained the same. The class distinction remained unchanged. During that time, it was the Europeans and the Indians, now it is the upper class Bengali and lower class Bengali. The upper class Bengalis are living in the urban area and the lower class Bengalis living in the rural areas. Fakir Lalon represents the rural area and upper class represents European sentiments. This is the reason for which we do not find any reference to Lalon or his philosophy in our educational institutions or curriculum. This takes us to my next point.

5.3 Westernized Education System

Folk culture remains as the culture of the marginalized people. Marginalized groups are often attributed qualities that are the antitheses of the ideal qualities of the greater populace. A constructed set of beliefs or which Foucault refers as "Discourse", were established by the rulers, to ensure maximum happiness for greatest number of people. This links us to the theory of "Utilitarianism", developed by John Stuart Mill. It is the idea that the moral worth of an action is solely determined by its contribution to overall utility. It believes that actions should be measured in terms of the happiness, or pleasure, that they produce. Doing greatest good for the greatest number is the main motto of this moral theory. However, the followers of it surely did not consider marginalized groups as a part of their greatest

number and prime focus was given on the urban people. Having said that, Baul movement was a totally spiritual movement and in Europe, the movement that was going on at the same time, was a materialistic one. The ultimate culmination of this materialistic movement was the Utilitarian philosophy. This was totally opposite to the spiritual Baul movement that was going on in Bengal during that period. As, the British were at the driving seats of Bengal's administration during the period, they naturally chose their philosophy over Bengali rural philosophy and imprinted those in Bengali curriculum.

Although the marginalized and the deprived are now resurrected in different areas studies disciplines, their cause is seldom served. Because of this resurgence of the oppressed in the academia, the oppressed is now dispossessed from reality and transformed into a product of the urban intelligentsia. In the article "Lalon's 'Moner Manus' (Man of Heart), Theories within Songs: a discourse on Folk Songs as an Effective Medium of Theories to Reach General Masses", research scholar Anirban Mondal claims, "By using some heavy weighted words we are at urbanized area trying to discuss the marginal; what will these really do for that marginal?" (Mondal, 1). This is what the Europeans also used to do. No one asked to, but they took the responsibility to speak on behalf of the marginalized groups. Gayatri Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" relates to this manner in which Western cultures investigate other cultures. By "Subaltern" Spivak means the oppressed subjects or more generally those of inferior rank. In the book, *An Analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak?* English lecturer Graham Riach states, "Spivak argues that the worlds' poorest people have no voice in society. She claims that the local elite- officials, educators, religious leaders- and Western scholars can never faithfully speak for them" (Riach, 9). She holds that, western academic thinking is produced in order to support western economic interests. They brought those aspects of history in academia which helped them to gain interest from the others. She also offers her concern about the danger of believing that

Western thinking can be used in non-Western contexts without causing problems. The distortion of Bengali history by erasing a particular rural or folk culture, and formalizing a Westernized model of education are some proofs of Spivak's concern.

In addition to that, in the name of civilizing the East, the European forefathers imprinted their foot on various countries as a source of autonomous power. This concept of 'power' takes us back to Foucault's theory of "Knowledge/Power", which has been discussed earlier. English philosopher Francis Bacon famously said, "Knowledge is power", in which Foucault put his firm belief. When the colonizers started their colonizing mission, they justified their action by claiming that they are blessed with their knowledge. Their rich collection of literature, success in trade and commerce, development in science—all these came to the front in defense of their claim. Once people started to believe in this, the colonizers soon gained the power they wanted. Having the power, they established "Discourse" which started to control the thoughts and actions of the people they ruled. As discussed previously, by inducing discourse, the authority is ensuring knowledge and by ensuring knowledge, it is forming power. In this regard, Spivak shows her view that knowledge is never innocent and it expresses the interest of its producers. For her, knowledge is like any other commodity that is exported from the west to the third world for financial and other types of gain. Thus, in order to carry out administrative actions in new colonies, the Europeans established political order and it was executed either by force or by Gramscian hegemony. Henceforth, they shaped Bengali culture by incorporating some aspects of European culture and philosophy and by omitting some aspects of Bengali culture, which includes Lalon or the Baul culture.

So, it has been explained that, it is an apparent matter how the urban or the ruling class control education in a country and as for us, that education system is highly influenced by European sentiments. Despite decolonization, our education system remains colonized

with upper class people at the helm, people who are European in thoughts and ideas. To these people, our rich history and culture, our philosophy and lived experiences are of less importance compared to the imported values and customs from Europe. A Lalon with his transcendental ideas, so to speak, may not matter to them, firstly because of his lower class status, and then again, for his subversion of the values they treasure so much. As examined by the Marxist Criticism, the production of art is being conducted by the ruling class and the consumption of art is happening under those ideologies, ascribed by them. As a result, educational system of a country, mostly of non-European countries like India and Bangladesh are getting affected. As renowned Lalon researcher, Farhad Mazhar addressed to the weak academic environment in Bangladesh; discussed in chapter 3, “Urban middle class has no idea about the massive materials on philosophy in Bengal’s oral culture” (Mazhar). Due to the fact, poet Lalon Shah, who is supposed to be in the academia, is living in and through the music industry.

In general, BEIC created new economic opportunities which resulted in the formation of the Bengali upper class. They founded William Fort College at Kolkata and with its foundation the modern period of Bengali literature started. Studying western culture, literature and translating Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Bengali books into English were the primary goals. Moreover, they funded the Bengali renaissance of Raja Ram Mohon Roy, Vidyasagar, Tagore etc. In doing so, a Bengali urban, liberal sophisticated culture was produced in collaboration with colonizers which shapes our dominant cultural constructions even today, including our notions of nationalism, secularism and academia. The fact that we are missing out valuable information and studies on rural areas and its intellectuals, is a result of this system.

5.4 Current State of Lalon Culture

Previously a discussion of Adorno's "Cultural Industry" was held where he argued that culture industry is associated with late capitalism in which all forms of culture including literature, films and music, become part of the capitalist system of production. We live on desires and we are constantly on the search of new ways of consumption. As Zygmunt Bauman asserted, "Our society is a consumer society" (Bauman, 79). Now, things can transform gradually depending on political situations and consumers' demands. As a consequence, commodification of culture is on the rise. Commodification means transforming something into a product for commercial purposes, an item to be bought and sold in the market. Intangible cultural heritage is frequently employed in the commercial sector, incorporated into many company names, branding, logos, and products. Tangible cultural heritage may also be commodified such as in the case of artworks intended to be sold commercially. The same is happening with Bengali cultural heritages like folk, Baul and Lalon cultures. To speak the truth, commodification of culture is consisted of both positive and negative outcomes.

To illustrate, currently in Bangladesh, modern singers are following the folk genre of music, particularly Lalon Shah's songs at reasonably high rate. Few bands of Kolkata are being formed as Lalon bands. Arup Rahee, a renowned Lalon researcher and singer of Bangladesh stated, "Nowadays, the rich do Lalon, middle class do Lalon, the poor do Lalon, intellectuals do Lalon, politicians do Lalon" (Rahee,1). This statement of Arup Rahee, clearly indicates that, Lalon culture which used to be labelled as popular or mass culture has now transformed into **High culture**. Going by the definition of **High Culture**, Lalon' songs have become a preference of society's elites. The medium through which Lalon has attracted the elites, is music. Music got this power to take a culture from one class to another. This is why, Adorno specifically talked about the music industry in his book. In response to Adornos'

music industry, English writer Robert Witkin said, “The parallel between music and society should not be seen as an unmediated one, however. Music is not of a different order but is part of social praxis. Its material has been socially formed” (10). Therefore, through music industry, Lalon as a popular culture icon has now become a popular choice of music to every class in a society. This is a positive outcome of commodification of culture. The inclusion of newer instruments and artists saw the Baul music genre getting enlarged and well defined as well as connecting urban listeners to their nostalgic roots. Famous music artist and Lalon researcher Maqsoodul Haque in his article “From Akhara to Fusion- the Transformation of Baul Music in Bangladesh” states, “Baul music had effectively moved out of village Akharas to thanas and district towns and to urban city centers including Kolkata, with Dhaka emerging in importance much later” (8). Thus, commodification of culture, paved the way of Baul music towards urban people, as well as global audience.

Furthermore, Lalon Shah is now not only gathering his listeners, but also getting attention from scholars all over the world. This links Lalon culture to the concept of Paradigm Shift, which was identified by American physicist Thomas Kuhn. It refers to a fundamental change in an individual’s or a society’s view towards a certain aspect. This happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is changed and replaced by a new and different way. In the beginning, Lalon culture was a part of the rural people or the masses but now it has transformed into a significant part of consumption for the Urban people and became High culture. In addition to that, previously not many scholars worked on the subject of Lalon and it did not have worldwide recognition but now many researchers, and scholars are researching on and writing about Fakir Lalon Shah. Carola Lorea, a Singaporean researcher in Bengali oral traditions, in her book *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman: A Journey Between Performance and the Politics of Cultural Representation* asserts, “Exalted as the indigenous philosopher of humanism and tolerance,

Lalon Fakir attracted academic and popular curiosity to the extent that the incessant production of scholarly publications is densely alternated by popular novels and movies inspired by the life and deeds of the celebrated folk poet” (44). In addition to that, in 2010, India-Bangladesh joined hands and made a movie based on the life and philosophy of Lalon Shah named “Moner Manush”. Although, many Lalon experts and disciples criticized the movie for providing some distorted information, it went to become a commercial success. In this way, Lalon’s works are entering the elite class of Bangladesh, becoming a part of **High culture**. Transformation from an unknown rural mystic to a widely recognized cultural icon did not place Lalon in the academia: insufficient scholarly works on his philosophy, intentional negligence in canonizing him, as well as reluctance to studying him alongside his Euro-American contemporaries are some of the issues that lie at the root of the gap between Lalon and our education system.

On the other hand, the negative outcomes of commodified Lalon culture is a matter of concern for many Lalon researchers and cultural critics. To begin with, as cultural objects become more interchangeable, each one declines in significance and loses its ‘aura’. According to Walter Benjamin, the aura of an art is an appearance of magical force arising from its uniqueness. When an art is being mechanically reproduced in this modern era, it loses its original unique touch and authenticity. These consequences of commodification are highly affecting Lalon culture. As I have just mentioned, the movie made on Lalon’s life, provided the audience with some distorted and wrong information, which ruined the authenticity of the cultural heritage. Nowadays, many people are singing Baul songs in their way and using different modern musical instruments. They are changing the tune and musicality in the way they like resulting in the distortion of the songs as the songs are losing their original unique touch. A common problem that arises during the documentation of any orally transmitted art from the primary source is that nobody can claim his or her work to be

absolutely authentic, since words and tune change when it is transmitted from one singer to another. Lalongeeti is no exception to the trend. After Lalon's death, many pseudo Bauls have labelled songs composed by other Baul gurus as Lalon's. As consumers, people are buying it and commodification is going on. In the last four years, Bangladesh is organizing 'Dhaka International Folk Fest' and gaining a huge amount of profit from it. Not to mention Banglalink, a renowned cellular network service provider, is sponsoring Lalon festival every year in Kushtia, the birthplace of Lalon. All these are examples of commodification of Baul culture that is happening in the country. In addition to that, another negative aspect of commodification of culture is, the loss of autonomy. For instance: Lalon was previously an autonomous culture but now, Lalon is being sold. It had its originality, uniqueness and autonomous power but now, all of these are being distorted. The commodification and reproduction of this particular culture, has completely detached it from the sphere of tradition. It has lost the continuity of its presentation and profundity of meaning.

Chapter 6

The Possible Solutions and Conclusion

Given these points and everything that has been discussed so far, it can be stated that, Lalon Shah and his philosophy rightfully deserve a place in our history and academic system. In order to do so, every citizen of this country should become more conscious about their culture. Culture not only represents a country but also its inhabitants. Just because something is being commodified and sold in the market, people not necessarily need to appreciate it. Before consuming we must think and know, what we are actually consuming. We should raise awareness within ourselves and the generation next about cultural heritages. Speaking about this, the “Proclamation of Masterpieces of the oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” was made by UNESCO starting in 2001 to raise awareness on intangible cultural heritage and encourage local people and communities to protect them. Several manifestations of intangible heritage around the world were awarded the title of *Masterpieces* to recognize the value of the non-material component of culture. In 2005, the Baul tradition was included in this list of “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”, which is undoubtedly a great news for us. Unfortunately, not many of us know about this prestigious achievement. This is because we lack awareness and have little interest in finding out things about own culture. Also the Westernized academic system does not allow us to dwell in such areas of the culture. This brings us to my claim against the educational process of Bangladesh.

It is high time we have changed the westernized structure of academia. We must know about western and other countries’ literatures, cultures but with prior and proper attention to our own. History should not be studied from the perspectives of the Europeans. Europeans had the power, controlled us, wrote our history but that does not mean only

Europeans created history. Almost every nation has their own history, own experiences, and own perspectives. This must be valued and included in this manner in the educational system. Lalon Shah was a rural roomer, uneducated and did not note down his philosophies. This should not make him ineligible for the academia. If his philosophies are similar to those western philosophies that we study today, then his philosophy also deserves a place in our academia. Lastly, every Lalon or Baul researcher needs to be provided with more fund, accessibility and resources for their research. This will allow them to come up with more exclusive information about Baul and Lalon cultures and this will pave the way and make it easier to conduct a research for new and young researchers.

To conclude, as can be seen, materialism has completely seduced the human mind. These days, people tend to believe in logic, yet they cannot differentiate logic that is biased towards their own selfishness and worldly desires, and logic that is completely hungry for knowledge and truth. Throughout history, literature provided us with all these knowledge and truth. Sadly, it is hard to find actual spirituality in today's literature or songs, but Bengali literature was born out of it. Starting from **Charyapad, Deho-totto, Sahajiyana** to Lalon Shah, each one of these movements are prime examples of spirituality and valuable literary assets of Bengali literature as well as culture. From the very beginning, Baul culture has gone through various social, economic and political changes and challenges. In the course of time, people's interests and values have changed radically. Today's society is largely unconcerned about the value of Baul songs and meditation, shoving this age old tradition towards a space where Baul's existence is endangered. Speaking of this, few possible solutions which can help us to stop this pitiful consequence from happening have been proposed here. Nevertheless, taking all the negativities and the limited range into account, Lalon Shah has been able to attain a certain subtlety of perception, large number of followers, and an easy style remarkable in a man of little formal education. Despite such concerns over cultural

erosion and the loss of an ancient art, the charm of Lalon's poetry remains unfazed. The thought-content in his songs is something to take notice, also an intense vision coupled sophisticated imagination. By the above discussions of his songs, we can clearly understand that Lalon re-humanizes philosophy by incorporating the lived experiences of the marginalized into his poetic framework. His philosophy is unquestionably 'man' centric as it is deeply based on the present condition of man. Without going through any social theory and literary format, Lalon Shah, through his meditation for "Moner Manush" (Man of Heart) has tried to dismiss the class, caste, gender and religious binaries. Lalon Shah's background as a common man and concern for the spiritual betterment are both clearly revealed in the songs.

His strong influence shaped the writing style and thought process of many famous artists throughout the years. Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam and many modern day singers have been heavily influenced by this great poet. His selfless concern for humanity is something to be taken appreciably in this modern era of chaos and dehumanization. What Karl Marx said about class discrimination long back in his time, what John Donne portrayed in his religious poems by using mysticism, the symbolic skills that Baudelaire depicted through his poems, Lalon Shah artistically represents them through his lyrics that without having any educational achievements.

Speaking of the aspect of commodification in the capitalist era, commodification of culture is inevitable. While there are many disadvantages, there can be many benefits to cultural sharing, such as expanding diversity through the creation of new and innovative art forms and expressions or blending and juxtaposing cultural ideas in compelling ways. The commodification of cultural heritage can also present interesting economic opportunities when done by, with the consent, and/or under the control of the originating community. It is not that cultural exchange and product marketing are inherently "bad"; rather, it is about respecting different values and legal traditions. It is always important to ask who is

benefiting, and whether this is at someone else's expense, especially when there are clear imbalances of power between those doing the appropriation, and those whose heritage is being appropriated.

Furthermore, by doing comparative study of Lalon Shah and Western philosophers, it has been proved that they have had similar attitudes toward life, poetic career, and mystic vision. This also proved his worth as a property of Bengali cultural heritage. Unfortunately, religious divide and politics continue to dominate lives of people even in contemporary societies throughout the world, together with gender discrimination and caste oppression. Therefore, it is astonishing to learn the vision of an unlettered man through his songs, on how he envisaged a class and gender equal society, long before the birth of modern communism and feminism. He has introduced a new trait in literature and gave the rural culture a literary recognition. He should be presented before the international community through the rendering of his literary works in different languages.

Now at our age, some active endeavors have been seen into the urban intelligentsia of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India to look back to the songs of Fakir Lalon Shah and his philosophy. But such a limited and regional attempt is not enough for Lalon's songs and philosophy which deals with the great themes as humanity, peace and fraternity. Both academic and non-academic youths have the duty and chance to bring up to date the cultural heritage and the vision of a society being a just, multifaceted society with same rights and same chances for all. For reviving the folklore tradition, we need massive campaign, support and patronage from the countrymen. Yet, it comes as a pleasurable fact to see that changes are taking place as Lalon's overflowing strong poetry was rendered into German, Italian, French, Japanese and Hindi. As a result, many foreign students and researchers are becoming interested and working on Lalon Shah. Many writers and researchers are writing and publishing their books on Baul and Lalon culture in various occasions like "Omor Ekushey

boi Mela". Finally, positive changes are happening as Lalon is coming in the form of literature. However, the significant change that still needs to be happened is the inclusion of his philosophy in Bengali academia. Along with western philosophies, there should be a proper place for our rural poet Lalon Shah's philosophies that shaped Bengali culture remarkably. It is high time we stopped following a westernized education system blindly and raise awareness for our literary history and cultural heritage. Lalon's philosophy was so radically progressive then and continues to be relevant to this day, because of his total breakdown of roles imposed on one by society, and his believe in every person's right to pursue their spiritual freedom as a priority, regardless of who they were and where they came from.

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