

# **The Sage and Society: Lalon Shah and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Social Movements in Bengal**



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**Dedication**  
**to**  
**My Late mother**  
**Pancha Bibi**



## **Declaration**

I do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “The Sage and Society: Lalon Shah and Nineteenth Century Social Movement in Bengal” submitted to the university of Dhaka for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, is an original work of mine. No part of it, in any form, has been submitted to any University, Institute or Department for any degree, diploma or for other similar purposes.

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I am very much blessed with Baulism as my family heritage. From my early boyhood I was quite acquainted with Baul philosophy and had a frequent in-depth discussion on Baul and Lalon's esoteric philosophy with my uncle Md. Chand Ali who encouraged me and his encourage seeded more inclination inside me to Lalon and his philosophy. From that inclination I started to learn about Lalon and finally decided to do something on Lalon Shah. So my first gratitude is to pledge to my uncle Md. Chand Ali. Besides this, persons to whom I must pay my debt are our family guru Rawsan Ali Khondaker (Tota Khondaker), Baul Guru Fakir Nahir, Aroj Ali Boyati, Saidur Rahman Bayati, Purna Das Baul (Inadia), Sanat Kumar Baul (India), Sanatan Das Baul (India).

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## Summary

Lalon, also known as Lalon Shah, or Lalon Fakir (1774–1890) was a Bengali Baul saint, lyricist of mystic songs, and a social thinker. His thoughts and ideas immensely impacted on the life and living of the subaltern population of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. In social and cultural life of Bangladesh Lalon is considered as an icon of religious tolerance. Through his philosophical lyrics, Lalon raised his voice against all discriminations of caste, class and creed in society. Lalon Shah was born in 1774, just five years after the great famine that caused deaths of millions in rural Bengal and is known as *Chhiyatturer Mannantor* in the history of modern India. Lalon's early life witnessed various significant events and revolutionary movements that had been taking place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Lalon, witnessed all these rebellious movements and mass upsurges which were mainly organized by the poor, wretched population. These movements and their ideologies had impacted on the life and living of Lalon profoundly and helped him to construct his own Philosophy of Humanity. The proclamation of highness of humanity was the core essence of Lalon's philosophy. By embracing Baul faith a cult based religious belief that originated in 17<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, Lalon succeeded in creating a common platform to protect the exploited, tortured, economically destitute people of rural Bengal against the bigotry of caste Hindus and class discrimination by the upper-class elites. Lalon's creative texts could be viewed as the manifestation of collective social consciousness of his time.

There is a necessity for evaluating Lalon's songs and lyrics because of the historical and social importance of the same. Lalon through his songs and preaching, in the stream of social relations identified the problems of caste and class differences, the idea of sacred and profane and in an implicit way showed the path to solve these problems. Thus in the above context it can be said that it is indeed important to realize the non-communal, socially conscious humanistic views that Lalon preached through his philosophy and mystic songs. Sociologically speaking, it can provide direction to the basic propensity of life and living of the people of this land. Critical analysis on Lalon's contribution in 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and its effect on contemporary social structure, social reaction concerning Lalon and his followers, could significantly enrich the existing literature on Lalon Shah. The studies so far have been carried out on Lalon Shah, are scattered between a numbers of approaches. In this context, this research

explicitly attempted to focus on 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and Lalon's role to provide a new dimension on the folk tradition of humanity of Bengal, spelled in the saying "...the ultimate truth is human being, nothing is more dignified than that of man".

The basic objective of the proposed study is to explore the impact of Lalon's ideas and philosophy that spread over 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. In order to cover the objective; discussions on contemporary Bengal society, social system, social customs and prejudices on different social movements which gained momentum both in the urban and rural areas of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and the influences of these movements in catalyzing changes in the society were made.

A number of studies have so far been conducted on Lalon both at home and abroad. Most of these studies attempted to put a religious identity on Lalon and attempted to en-caste him as a Hindu or a Muslim. Further, some researches had also been carried out by portraying Lalon and his philosophy from the traditional concept about Baulism . Many researches attempted to explain the essence of his philosophy as a scripture of secret arduous practice of Baul community. This research is an attempt to cover the life and teachings of Lalon Shah, a 19<sup>th</sup> century sage of Bengal. It is an attempt to analyze his teaching that shook the mind set of rural mass of Bengal in general, as well as to a great extent even to the newly emerged Kolkata based educated gentry during that period. Even today, the appeal of Lalon's philosophy did not fade away rather gradually is gaining momentum among all sections of people. The reason is, his teachings holds humane appeal, particularly for the down trodden people of the society.

It is not possible to measure quantitatively the impact of Lalon's teaching and preaching on the mental sphere of the subaltern population and also the educated gentry of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also it is not possible to quantify the reasons for which Lalon is still remembered with respect and why does a good number of present generation population is gradually leaning towards Lalon's ideals in Bangladesh. The reason is psycho social impacts of such issues are not quantifiable. As such I have basically applied qualitative method for conducting this research. One of the important

techniques of qualitative method of doing research is “Historical Analytical technique”. Research based on Historical Analytical technique needs in-depth analysis of historical facts and figures. Doing research based on historical data one need to be able to understand the reality behind the historical events, need to understand the facts behind the facts. The very nature of this research demands that the method of the study should be historical analytical, a technique that is often used in qualitative research. The reason for choosing the ‘Historical Analytical’ technique for conducting this research is, it is basically an analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and the narrative of the life and living of one of the great sage of the time named ‘Lalon Shah.’

The term “social movement” is being used to denote wide verities of Conception. There are number of competing frame works in the field and each conceptualizes movements differently. Encyclopedia Britannica defines Social Movement as “loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society’s structures or values.” Social movements may differ in size but they all are essentially collective efforts and they are more or less products of spontaneous union of people. Though the relationships of this union cannot be defined by rules and procedures, but people in union merely share a common outlook (Encyclopedia Britannica 2017). The mass upsurge during British rule in India or tacit protests against oppression, or attempts to reform the social behavior in Bengal during the same period are examples of social movements. I have used Frame analysis for theoretical analysis of my research issue. Frame analysis (also called framing analysis) is a multi-disciplinary social science research method applied to analyze social movement theory, policy studies and is generally attributed to the work of Erving Goffman. In social sciences, ‘framing’ denote a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies, organize, perceive, and communicate about reality. ((Bateson1972,Tversky&Kahneman1981). One of such frames is ‘Collective Action Frame’. Collective action frames perform this interpretive function. Collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (ibid: 199). In specific I applied Collective Framing model in analyzing my research findings.



19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal emerged as the epicenter of socio-cultural and religious reform movements in the history of modern India. Conquest of India by the British Imperial Power and subsequent changes due to British colonial rule initiated the modern era of Indian history. Ironically, British colonial administration in spite of playing a positive role in transforming medieval India to modern; it also had serious negative and harmful effects that viciously intimidated the people and society of India. British colonial policy in the language of Marx became the “unconscious tool of history” in bringing about structural changes of the society that have had both negative and positive effects.

The changes were massive. The task was difficult for the society at large to systematically accommodate all the transformations that had been taking place in the social and political arena of the country. Most of these changes had negative consequences that specifically affected the subaltern sections of the society. As a consequence chaos and confusion swigged the entire country. In order to survive from all the tribulations of the time, different social movements surfaced in Bengal. Obviously most of these movements were organized and participated typically by the lower stratum population of the society, who were the most sufferers of the changes. Some of these movements were also commenced under the patronage of Kolkata based British backed newly emerged English educated Hindu elite class. Ironically movements initiated by the Hindu upper class remained confined within the class boundary of the elite population and did not create any positive effect on the social and economic life and living of the people in the lower stratum, the most oppressed section of the population.

The rural based movements had two different dimensions; firstly, anti British activities in the form of religious reform movements that finally turned into armed revolts against the British rule, and the second type was fundamentally cult or folk religious movements organized under the patronage of the lowest stratum of population of the society. These cults based folk religious movements were basically tacit kind of defiance against all religious bigotry, class and caste differences and economic and social oppressions of the elites. The essence of their philosophy was to uphold the dignity of humanity.

The social history of Bengal has been illuminated with the surfacing of different cult or folk religious movements that left significant impact on the life and living of the very common people of rural areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. In a sense, these movements surpassed the urban social movements of the elites in terms of winning over the faith and confidence of the mass people. These cult or folk religious movements have immense sociological significance in constructing the social history of Bengal. These folk religious movements in the form of cultic practices were in actual; kinds of indirect defiant movements of the lower class population against the religious bigotry and social discrimination of the upper caste and class population that had been undermining the poor mass people from the remote past. Folk religion basically thus could be viewed as a kind of social and cultural defiance against the oppression, religious bigotry and all sorts of social injustice.

In the first phase of 18<sup>th</sup> century, several folk religious movements in India debuted essentially based on the core essence of Gudiya Vaisnavism by Chaitnya Dev. As well as, these cultic religions also had greatly been influenced by the Islamic preaching of the Sufi saints. It is mentionable that Sree Chaitnya Dev of Bengal in order to protect Hinduism from the advent of liberal Islamic ideology initiated his movement. His preaching was especially targeted towards indigent low caste Hindu population who during that period of Bengal history, in groups influenced by the liberal socialistic ideology of Islam, started converting themselves to Islam. Initially Chaitannya Devs attempts to liberalize traditional strict caste based Hinduism opened a new horizon for the subaltern groups in upholding the dignity of their rights in society as human being and as well to perform freely their religious activities. But on the other hand, Islamic Sufism also brought more liberal outlet that faster triggered the process of liberal thinking among common people for upholding their rights in the society. The teaching of Sufi Islam helped the subaltern population to interpret the Holy Scriptures in their own ways by exploring the philosophical crux of religion which also paved the way for the emergence of other folk religions in Bengal. Thus; parallel cult philosophies emerged under the patronage of non-privileged lower class population of the society in the form of folk religions. It is worth mentioning that influence of Sufi philosophy could be termed as one of the principal root-causes of the emergence of folk religions in Bengal. The spread of Islam was made possible by the preaching of Sufi saints. These Sufi saints as has already been mentioned called for a social amity among people of

different social stratum, irrespective of class, caste, religion and creed. Their simple life and living, treatment of general mass without any prejudice and call for a building a system without any discrimination, obviously attracted poorer and untouchable segments who had been prey of social and economic discrimination of the elites for thousands of years.

Essences of all these minor or folk religions have one goal in common- to promote the dignity of human being. Based on this philosophy of life, exploited people of the lower social stratum ventured to explain the reasons for their wretched day to day life experiences added with oppression and suppression of the upper class population of the society on them. These minor religions provided psychological supports and sheltered these poor people by enlightening them about the meaning of life and living from humanistic view points, as well to fight against all odds of life. Among these folk religions that emerged in Bengal, four major folk religions are notable for their activities that attracted poor people from the nook and corner of Bengal. These are Shaheddhoni, Balhari, Kartabhoja and Baulism

Baulism has its philosophical roots in different folk religious traditions that existed in Bengal from remote past, such as from “Nathism” a religious tradition which combines ideas of Brahminism, from Budhdhist Shahajia ideas, from Shaibaism, from Vaisnav Shahajia tradition and also from Sufi Islam. The humane philosophical approach of Shahajia and that of Sufi-ism reigned supreme during 19<sup>th</sup> century among the exploited rural mass people as means of emancipation from all sorts of social injustice imposed by the ruling elites on the subaltern population of Bengal for long. These ideas profoundly exerted influence in the development of Baulism in Bengal. However; the basic theoretical assumption of Baul religious doctrine and philosophy has similarity with that of the idea of ‘Radha-Krishna or idea of ‘duality in one’ that is about nature and human being, or ‘absolute or supreme being’ of ‘Sufism’ and Upanishad.

The customary idea about the origin of the Baul sect is that, after the death of Chaitannadev the great 15<sup>th</sup> century religious reformer, his followers disseminated his ideas as a movement throughout Bengal and its adjacent areas. Approximately 1625 AD is said to be the year when

Baulism as a separate minor religion surfaced in the soil of Bengal. It is believed that one Madhabbi and Awulchand were the creator of Baul sect. Later, one Birchandra or Birvadra a disciple of Madhabbi and son of Nittanondo popularized Baulism among the mass population of the then Bengal. It needs to be mentioned here that, though Baulism had surfaced in 17<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, but its core philosophical ideas were known to the mass people from long past. (Bhattacharya. U.2001. p.1).

The philosophical foundation of the Baul sect like all other minor religions of Bengal also is deeply rooted in the traditional Lokayata philosophy of the land. In course of its long journey, Baulism in mid17<sup>th</sup> century could finally establish itself as the most popular minor religious doctrine, dedicated for emancipating the subaltern population of rural Bengal from the religious and social persecution of the ruling elites. Baulism as a doctrine thus could be termed as a defiant ideology against the ruling philosophy- the philosophy of the higher class people of the society and surfaced in the soil of Bengal with an aspiration to protect the down trodden population of Bengal from social and religious maltreatment of the ruling class. Thus the core philosophical development of the Baulism, its inner mysticism and esoteric method of austerity were the domino effect of socio-economic exploitation and persecution of the people of lower class and caste by the upper caste ruling elites. In view of the above it can be said that emergence of Baul cult and subsequent cultic religions were in fact cultural revolution of the lower class people in the soil of Bengal against the ideological and social hegemony of the ruling elites. (Hossain. A. I. 2016. p. 45). Baulism as a philosophy could be viewed as an amalgamation of different Lokayata philosophies, Tantrism, Sufi-ism, Buddhist Sahajiya, Nathism and Vaisnava ideologies. In the following passages brief discussions of the different philosophical roots of Baulism is presented.

Baulism as a cult movement is based on ten tattas or premise. These are Dehatatta (mysticism of body), Atma tatta (Self-revelation), Manush Tatta (Human revelation), Guru Tatta (Guruism), Nabi Tatta (Prophetism), Sreesti Tatta (theory of Creation), Param Tatta (Theory of Supreme being ), Gour Tatta (Gourism ), Sadhan Tatta ( Theory of Austerity) and Nur Tatta (Enlightenment ). Among these Tattas or premise, Deha Tatta, Manush Tatta, Atma Tatta and Guru Tatta are the most significant. Though apparently it appears that Bauls interpret all their

Tattas from mystic point of views, but at the end analysis all these Tattas turn out to be more practical in nature having sociological significance rather than that of mystic.

Fakir Lalon Shah became a most elusive character in the history of cult religions of Bengal. In many instances, scholars and researchers turned secular Lalon into a sectarian figure in their writings. The trend of the researchers have been to portray Lalon as Hindu or Muslim in their own way of thinking. This is the reason, why identity of Lalon did still remain ambiguous and controversial.

Lalon's preaching is often referred as religious cult. It was Kangal Harinath Mojumder who first mentioned Lalon's preaching as tenets of new religion. Obviously the question may arise whether Lalon's doctrine could be considered as religion. Did Lalon want to preach a new religion? This is a vital question. In 1909 A.D. poet Rabindranath Tagore in his speech said; "I am very curious about the life history of the preachers of minor religions. When I travel in rural areas of Bengal, I noticed some sages are preaching their sermons on their personal endeavor. They are not always been accepted by the civil society, but my personal opinion is, we should pay heed to their preaching, and if we could do so, then we would understand that how these minor religions could assert their impacts on the social structure in Indian subcontinent. I know about one of such religious preachers. His name is Lalon Fakir. He, by amalgamating Islam and Zionism made such a syncretized religious idea that mesmerizes us." Lalon's activities spread in an enlightened environment of Kumarkhali. Fakir Lalon Shah was the product of that society and he inherited his musical talent from the soil of rural Bengal.

The measures taken by the British imperial power for consolidating their colonial rules, paved the way for the emergence of new feudal nobility in Bengal. This new elite class, who were Hindu by religion, was created with active supports of the British authority to serve the commercial interests of the British rulers. The collective effects of wealth and education created a kind of social awakening among the urban Hindu upper class residents of Kolkata. Different social and political institutions, organizations like Hindu Mela, National Congress, Brahmmo Samaj movement and so on surfaced in Kolkata under the leadership of this newly educated

Hindu middle class created by the British rulers. These institutions had played key roles in creating national bourgeoisie awakening among the newly educated Hindu aristocracy. Favorable wind started propelling in the arena of art and literature of Bengal centering Kolkata. The educational, political, social, cultural, literature, religious life, of Bengal became illuminated with the appearance of personalities like Rammohun Roy (1772-1830), Radhakanta Dev(1783-1867), Derozeo (1809-1831), Debendranath Thakur(1817-1905), Vidyasagar(1820-1891), Modhushudan Dutta (1824-1873), Akkhya Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), Ramkrishna Poromhansa (1836-1886), Keshob Chandra (1838-1884), Bankimchandra(18938-1894) and later Rabindranath Thakur, Henry Vivian Louis Derozeo and his disciples.

The initiatives taken by these urban educated elites gradually turned into social movements. The Kolkata based social movements sometimes referred to as so called Bengal renaissance could not come up with any non-sectarian, liberal universal humanitarian ethical views. The Bengali Muslim community, the rural poor and schedule caste Hindus of colonial Bengal, who were deprived of modern western education had no linkage with the so called Bengali renaissance. On the one side, illiteracy, conservative thinking, and false idea of nationalism among the Muslims of the then Bengal as well as, on the other side the idea of cultural differences of the caste Hindus and their disrespect, apathetic attitudes towards Bengali Muslim community barred the Muslims to become emotionally involved in the so called Bengali renaissance movement. This is why, this so called renaissance of Bengal in no way can be termed as the outcome of joint efforts of Hindu and Muslim communities neither had it helped to unify Hindus and Muslims. Rather as a consequence, contradictions, differences and hatred between Hindus and Muslims of Bengal became evident.

At the same time when endeavors of the Kolkata based urban English educated Hindu middle class for so called mass awakening were in the offing, condition of mass upsurges in the rural Bengal was ripening fast among the socially deprived rural mass in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. History tells us, the introduction of Permanent Settlement and the creation of new zamindars, had tremendous negative impact on the mass population of Bengal. It caused a severe famine that grasped the whole of Bengal which in history is known as ‘Chiattarer Mannantar’. Almost two

third population of Bengal was wiped out due to this famine. Moreover; colonial misrule, extreme extortion of money from the *Ryots* by the agents of British authority the zamindars, want of foods and so on all these events resulted in numbers of armed mass upsurges against the British rule in the country. Among these Farazi movement, Revolt by Titu Mir, Indigo Revolt and Farmers Revolt are famous anti-colonial movements that shook the whole of Bengal presidency in 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Kolkata based social movements had limited impacted on the society. It did not leave any positive result for the common people of Bengal excepting supporting some elite population of Kolkata city. Kolkata based movements were basically reformative movement. No movements in Kolkata were vocal about the welfare of common people or no movement of Kolkata talked against zamindary oppression and British suppression. But movements that steamed in rural areas, though started as religious revivalism, but eventually these movements turned into mass revolution. And similarly the rural based movements also were sectarian in nature. These rural upsurges at the end turned into class struggle at one stage but those movements in the long run failed to come up with any concrete positive effects for the people due to poor leadership.

Rural peasantry and artisans of this land that we now call Bangladesh, could be termed as the real architect of imperative national values, traditions, rituals, crafts and culture. These traditional values, social order and culture are yet to be diminished from our rural social life. Primal mode of production of the indigenous population of this land had been in existence along with that of feudal and semi feudal production system for centuries (Ronald Segal: The Crisis of India). Primordial culture, rituals and religious beliefs of the rural population still have parallel existence with that of urban cultural life. These beliefs and religious life pattern are different from that of ruling ideas and religions and are known as minor or folk religions.

Baulism emerged as a minor Lokyata religion from the soil of Bengal and could be termed as the cultural invention of our ancestors. In Nineteenth century Bengal, Baulism reached its zenith with the appearance of Fakir Lalon Shah as Baul Guru. Indeed under his gifted guidance during

this period of history, Baulism spread all over Bengal. The role of Fakir Lalon Shah as the ‘Guru’ of 19<sup>th</sup> century Baul community carries historical significance in constructing the social history of Bengal. Lalon through his lyrical songs sent messages to the down trodden population to uphold the dignity of human being. His teaching had tremendous impact on the poor, exploited segment of the population of Bengal. His teaching left various directions about life and living of the lower stratum population of the society. His activities were not confined within preaching religious sermons only; rather he also literally organized mass people to fight against all social oppressions and persecutions of the upper class.

Many folk movements in different periods of history, had ideologically challenged the authority of the classical religious ideas of the mankind. Basically these movements are organized by the peasants or the producers’ class and are directed against the plundering and extorting the products of the labor of the laborer, against exploitation of the people. Exploited mass population, attempted to stand against the structural frame of the exploitation based on social norms and religion. Baulism is one of such folk religious movements and reached its zenith under the leadership of Lalon Shah. The end aim of such movements was to achieve a society based on social justice, and a society where people can ascertain that human being could flourish their natural talents and establish oneself as a real human being in the society. The basic aim of the peasant movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal was to establish a society where they could leave with dignity and honor. These movements had limited intention of overthrowing the British rule. These movements finally could not sustain in the face of British all out aggression. But Lalon’s idea was different. He tried to change the mindset of the exploited poor wretched mass people through his mesmerizing teaching and preaching on human dignity and supremacy of human being. This was a direct challenge against established religious and social norms of the society. He was successful in organizing large section of down trodden people in rural Bengal, guided them towards a meaningful, dignified life. And, Lalon’s teaching and preaching still has strong humane appeal to people of all classes. In spite of his idealistic philosophical outlook, Lalon no doubt could be termed as an icon of a social movement that aimed at establishing a society based on fraternity, brotherhood and equality in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.



## Content

Certificate	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Summary	vi-xvi
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Social Background of Cult Movement in Bengal	4
2.0 Relation and Justification of the study	5
3.0 Objective of the Study	7
4.0 Scope of the Study	8
5.0 Conclusion	9
6.0 Review of Relevant Literature	10
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>Methodology</b>	
2.0 Introduction	13
2.1 Qualitative Research	13
2.2 Historical Method of Research	15
2.3 Techniques of Data Collection	16
2.3.1 Literature Review	17
2.3.1.1 Components of Literature Review	17
2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews	18
2.3.2.1 Advantage of KII	19
2.4 Stages of Research	19
2.4.1 Sources of Research Materials	20

2.4.1.1 Primary Sources of Information	20
2.4.1.2 Secondary Sources of Information	20
2.5 Research Area	21

## **Chapter Three**

### **Social Movement: A Theoretical and Conceptual Frame**

3.0 Introduction	22
3.1 Different Conceptual Views on Social Movement	22
3.1.1 Marx's View on Social Movement	22
3.1.2 Max Weber's View on Social Movement	24
3.1.3 Collective Behavior View on Social Movement	25
3.1.4 Mass Society View on Social Movement	25
3.1.5 Blumer's Four Stages of social Movement	26
3.1.5.1 Stage 1: Emergence	27
3.1.5.2 Stage 2: Coalescence	28
3.1.5.3 Stage 3 : Bureaucratization	29
3.1.5.4 Stage 4: Decline	30
(i) Repression	30
(ii) Co-option	31
(iii) Success	31
(iv) Failure	31
3.1.5.5 Application	32
3.1.6 Relative Deprivation View	33
3.1.7 Resource Mobilization View	33
3.1.8 Frame Analysis	35
3.1.8.1 Framing and Social Movement	36
3.1.8.2 Core Framing Task	37
3.1.8.3 Categories of Framing	37
(a) Diagnosis Frame	37
(b) Prognostic Frame	38

(c) Motivational Frame	38
3.1.8.4 Frame Alignment	39
3.1.8.5 Amplification	40
3.1.8.6 Extension	40
3.1.8.7 Transformation	40

## Chapter Four

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Social Movement in Bengal**

4.0 Introduction	42
4.1 Emergence of Kolkata based Social Movement	42
4.1.1 Brahmasamaj Movement	43
4.1.2 Sutee Movement	49
4.1.3 Widow Remarriage Movement	51
4.1.4 Young Bengal Movement	54
4.2 Rural Movement	60
4.2.1 Farayezi Movement	60
4.2.2 Revolt by Titu Mir	63
4.2.2.1 Confrontation with Zaminders	64
4.2.2.2 Confrontation with the British	65
4.2.3 Indigo Movement	65
4.2.4 Peasant Movement	67
4.2 Conclusion	70

## Chapter Five

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal and Emergence of Cult Movement**

5.0 Introduction	71
5.1 Folk Religion: Meaning and Definition	73
5.2 Emergence of Folk Religion	76

5.3 Sufi-ism in Bengal	79
5.4 Philosophical Background	82
5.5 Different School of Folk Religions of Bengal	86

## **Chapter six**

### **Major Cult Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal**

6.0 Introduction	88
6.1 Shaheddhani Cult	90
6.1.1 Mantras	95
6.1.2 Sadhana	96
6.1.3 Taboo	99
6.1.4 Festivals	100
6.1.5 Symbolism	103
6.2 Kartabhoja Cult	104
6.2.1 Mantras	109
6.2.2 Sadhanas	111
6.2.3 Taboo	112
6.2.4 Festivals	113
6.3 Balahari Cult	117
6.3.1 Sadhana	122
6.3.1.1 Khastan	123
6.3.1.2 Eyotan	123
6.3.1.3 Nityon	125
6.3.1.4 Bodhitan	125
6.3.2 Taboo	129
6.3.3 Festivals	130
6.3.4 Myth	132
6.3.5 Mantras	133
6.3.6 Harirami Sermon	137
6.4 Conclusion	139

## Chapter Seven

### Origin and Development of Baulism in Bengal

7.0 Introduction	144
7.1 Philosophical Foundation of Baulism	146
7.2 Historical Background of the Emergence of Baulism	146
7.3 Philosophical Background of Baulism	149
7.3.1 Lokayata Darshan	149
7.3.1.1 Charvaka Philosophy	149
7.3.1.2 Sangkhya Philosophy	151
7.3.1.2.1 Sangkhya Philosophy and Existence of God	153
7.3.1.2.2 Bondage and Salvation	153
7.3.1.3 Yoga Philosophy	153
7.3.1.4 Tantrism	154
7.3.1.4.1 Defining Tantrism	155
7.3.1.4.2 The Origin of Tantric Tradition	157
7.3.1.4.3 Influence of Tantrism on other Religious Tradition	157
7.3.1.4.4 Tantrism in Bengal	157
7.3.1.5 Buddhist Sahajiya Movement	159
7.3.1.6 Sufi-ism	161
7.3.1.6.1 Basic Tenets of Sufi-ism	162
7.3.1.6.2 Sufi Influence in Bengal	165
7.3.1.6.3 Influence of Sufi-ism on Baul Sect	165
7.3.1.7 Nathism	167
7.3.1.8 Vaisnava Sahajiyaism	170
7.4 Conclusion	173

## Chapter Eight

### Baul Tatta: An Overview

8.0 Introduction	176
8.1 Dehatatta	176

8.1.1 Chari Chandra Ved	177
8.1.2 Rasa Sadhana	179
8.2 Atma Tatta	184
8.3 Manush Tatta	187
8.4 Guru Tatta	194
8.5 Baul Sadhana (Baul Religious Practice)	198
8.5.1 Sthulo	198
8.5.2 Proborto	200
8.5.3 Sadhak	201
8.5.4 Siddhi	201
8.6 Vek Khelafat	205
8.7 Sadhusanga: An Alternative Way of life	206
8.7.1 Weekly Sadhusanga	209
8.7.2 Yearly Sadhusanga	212
8.8 Sadhusanga: A symbol of an Alternative Society	212
8.9 Taboo	212
8.10 Norms and Values	213
8.11 Festival	213
8.11.1 Machchhab	213
8.11.2 Lalon Sarantsab	215
8.12 Conclusion	215

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Lalon and His Contemporary Society**

9.0 Introduction	217
9.1 British Conquest of Bengal and its Impact	219
9.2 Social Movement in Colonial Bengal	222
9.3 Lalon Shah and His Activities	223
9.4 Conclusion	236

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Lalon Shah and Baul Movement**

10.0 Introduction	239
10.1 Lalon's Social Movement	240
10.2 Anti Lalon Movement	250
10.3 Lalon's Contribution to Women Liberty	253
10.4 Lalon Shah and Rural Renaissance in 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Bengal	262
10.5 Sociological Interpretation of Lalon's Songs	267
10.6 Conclusion	281

## **Chapter Eleven**

<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b>	285
----------------------------------	-----

Bibliography	296
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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*"History calls those men the greatest who have enabled themselves by working for the common good; experience acclaims as happiest the man who has made the greatest number of people happy" (Karl Marx).*

#### 1.0: Introduction

**Lalon** also known as **Lalon Shah**, or **Lalon Fakir** (1774–1890) was a Bengali Baul saint, lyricist of mystic songs and a social thinker. His thoughts and ideas immensely impacted the life and living of the subaltern population of 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. In social and cultural life of Bangladesh he is considered as an icon of religious tolerance. Lalon's songs inspired and influenced not only the impoverished rural population of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, but also attracted many poets, intellectuals, social and religious thinkers such as personalities like Ram Mohun Roy, Maharshi Debendranath Thakur, Rabindranath Thakur, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Allen Ginsberg. Lalon through his lyrical preaching rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed in society. Ironically during his life time and even after his death, Lalon has been applauded and at the same time faced bitter criticism for his secular thinking. (Karim . A.;2012;p.27). Lalon Fakir could be termed as the greatest mystic-singer of Indian subcontinent (Sharif, A. 2003p.57). He could also be portrayed as a radical voice of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Lalon aspired for a total positive change through his peaceful teaching in the fatalistic mind set of the people of the land known as Bangladesh today.

Lalon had no formal education, but he composed numerous songs in 19<sup>th</sup> century lyrical Bangla. These songs still are considered as sources for providing spiritual and political inspirations to thousands of his disciples; most of whom are rural peasants—a class from which Lalon himself originated (Choudhury A.A,2002: p.21). His philosophy upholds the famous saying of 'Chandidas' another mystic poet of medieval Bengal "Sabar Upore Manush Sotto, Tahar Upore nai" meaning "...the supreme truth is human being and nothing is superior to man."

Lalon Shah was born in 1774 just five years after the great famine that caused the death of millions in rural Bengal. This famine is popularly known in Bengal History as 'Chhiyatturer



Mannantor.’ Lalon’s early life experienced various significant events that had been taking place in the then Bengal. After the British took over administrative power from the Mughals, the new rulers started to reshape the whole administrative system in such a way that only serves and supports their purpose for colonial plunder in India. Initially the main objective of taking over ruling power of Bengal by the British was aimed at making profit through business and not to establish a stabilized political environment or to establish a good governing system. British rulers introduced several measures and enacted different acts and laws like Permanent Settlement Act in 1793, through which they had been able to plunder the country for meeting their own colonial needs. Consequently, British rule destroyed the basic social and economic fabrics of the country by their intentional misrule, and the country as a whole fell into the grip of severe social and economic crisis (Hossain A.I. 2013, p.65). This ultimately resulted in proliferation of some movements against the British rule. In particular these movements were organized and lead by the oppressed people of rural Bengal. Some of these movements took the shape of armed rebellion under different names and ideology such as Fakir movement (Fakir Andolon) led by Fakir Mojnu Shah, Musha Shah, Farayezi movement (Farayezi Andolon) led by Hazi Shariatullah and later on by his son Dudu Miah, Peasant movement (Krishak Bidroh) in Pabna district, Indigo movement and Tea laborer movement.

Lalon witnessed all these rebellious movements and mass upsurges which were mainly participated and supported by the down trodden rural population of Bengal Presidency. The core essence of these movements and their ideologies impacted the life pattern of Lalon and helped him to construct his own philosophy of Humanity. The proclamation of highness of humanity was the core of Lalon’s philosophy. The main message of his philosophy was to love fellow human beings. His philosophical preaching proclaimed, “God dwells within the human soul” and as such one can reach god just by serving humanity only. According to the teaching and preaching of Lalon Shah, one need not have to follow different religions and rituals to get closer to God, but it is possible to reach God only by surrendering oneself to Human Guru. To him human-mind is holier place than that of mosque, temple, and pagoda or church, because human mind is the place where God dwells. His philosophy could be compared with the philosophy of Socrates, Ibnul Arabi, Rumi and Hafeez (Sarkar Md. S. A, 2009 p.7). Lalon’s philosophy though contains metaphysical ideas, but it has elements of materialism in a subtle way. In his teaching

Lalon puts more emphasis on the application of wisdom instead of supporting utopian ideas.

Lalon said:

‘God, Goddess and all sorts of worship and prayer

Are not mystical but man’s creation.

Human imagination is not capable of conceiving

The image of invisible phenomenon.’

Lalon’s disciple and worthy successor Dabir Uddin alias Doddu Shah also endorsed the same view and uttered,

‘Man’s caste or religion

Is not the creation of God’

A sage of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lalon’s radical voice in course of time twirled the mindset of the subaltern population of rural Bengal towards radical thinking. The humanitarian appeal of his songs, at the end, surpassed the mysticism and turned as slogan for the emancipation of the poorer segment of population from oppression of the elite class of the society. Validity of different evil customs, malpractice of various norms, values and social orders which belittled the subaltern population from remote past and kept them as the subhuman being, were challenged in the songs of Lalon Shah.

Europe during the period from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, witnessed cultural revivalism that bridged the Medieval Europe with modern era. This cultural revivalism is known as *Renaissance* in European history. *Renaissance* is characterized by a surge of interests in Classical scholarship and values. It was primarily a time of the revival of Classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation. Like European *Renaissance*, Lalon’s preaching could also be termed as an attempt to revive the humanitarian philosophy of Bengal that existed in the form of ‘Lokayat Darshan’ from time immemorial but declined due to long period of consecutive foreign rules causing stagnation in the social and cultural life of the people. Thus in a sense Lalon’s philosophy could also be termed as a kind of rural renaissance movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. The most significant characteristics of renaissance were humanism and dependence on logical interpretation of phenomenon. Both these characteristics could also be observed in the philosophy of Lalon.

Lalon’s creative texts portrayed prominently the collective social consciousness of his time. At the same time, Lalon in his texts also did not deny the value of individual consciousness in

society. It is important to understand that the limit of 'social consciousness' is extensively vast. Political consciousness, ethical consideration, sense of social justice, science, literature, philosophy, religion, all these are rooted in social consciousness and Lalon's teaching and preaching laid a hand on all the above issues.

Through his mystic songs, Lalon preached about freedom of body, soul, and even language from all repressive and divisive forces. He was opposed to caste system, sectarianism, and colonialism. In short, Lalon opposed all sorts of social discriminations that undermine dignity of human beings. "He represents and exemplifies the true revolutionary and secular nature of his community known as *Baul*, a community of lower class illiterate, wandering singers of rural Bengal. Their wisdom and wit do not steam from any academic training, but emerge from the active contact with everyday life and living of oppressed people belonging to lower social stratum of which they are a part."(Sahrif A. 1972:52).

### **I.I Social Background of Cult Movements in Bengal**

Bengal was the microcosm of British rule in India, the original seat of Imperial power, the base from which the East India Company set out on its career of aggrandizement, ending in the complete subjugation of the subcontinent. Private loot, the organized spoliation of commerce, industry and agriculture, far-reaching administrative innovations, educational reforms, the acceptance of new and liberating ideas from the West by a rising and articulate Hindu bourgeoisie, the intensification of certain archaic social relations by the colonial power—these were all part of the complex and contradictory fabrics of colonized Bengal. It was against this background that initial indications emerged of an Indian national consciousness and of the rival forms such consciousness could assume. Through the prism of Bengal's historical experience were to be refracted significant themes of the later development of India as a whole.

However, it is of no doubt that 19th century Bengal marched forward through different progressive and revolutionary movements both urban and rural based, triggered due to British conquest. Among these, some cult movements also got momentum in rural Bengal during the period. These cult movements were basically secular and humanitarian in nature and their core ideological target was to free human being from the persecution of the social discrimination designed by the upper class people. It needs to be mentioned here that at this stage of Indian history centering Kolkata some urban social movements were initiated by educated newly emerged articulate Hindu bourgeoisie and during the same period some rural movements besides

the cult movements also were initiated basically by the fundamentalist Islamist scholars. These rural based movements organized by the Islamist scholars were apparently movements for Islamic revivalism in India and ended as armed revolts against British rule. Their basic aim was to overthrow British rule and reestablish Islamic rule in India. Though these revivalist movements had religious fervor and were initiated by the Muslim revivalist leaders, but these movements basically were peasant movements and gained massive supports from impoverished mass population of rural Bengal at large, irrespective of their religious identities. The reason was, these movements though in appearance were clad in the veil of religious ideology, but in essence were revolts of the exploited poorer segment of the population in rural Bengal against the exploitative and anti people system of the British rule and their local agents.

On the other hand the fundamental intention of the cult movements that appeared in Bengal, were also to liberate the very common mass population from oppression and social injustice of the upper caste Hindus and elite population of the society. The fundamental differences between the Islamist revivalist movements and cult movements was that, the former movements aimed at overthrowing British raj through armed struggles and free the people, but the cult movements were passive in nature and preached the way for emancipation of the people through changes in the mindset and not through any armed revolt. All these cult movements advocated for the moral and humanitarian liberty of the people of the nineteenth century Bengal. Fakir Lalon Shah emerged as a charismatic figure in the midst of these cults based rural movements. It was under his leadership Baulism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal re-surfaced as a major cult movement and also as the catalyst of social change.

## **2.0 Rational and Justification of the study**

Scholars for last one century have been endeavoring to amass Baul and Lalon songs and lyrics. Parallel to that, researches and discussion on the life and works of Lalon and other Baul gurus, Baulism and Baul lyrics and songs have also been premeditated by different researchers and scholars. But their attempts mainly focused on the spiritual, ascetic or mystic values of Baulism and Lalon, or at best these were attempts to make comparisons of the same with that of other mystic songs of Bengal. Ironically, no worth mentioning studies or research on the social or historic importance or significance of Lalon and Baulism, or about the non-communal humanistic character and outlook of Lalon or Baulism are traceable. Poet Rabindranath Thakur

realized this deficiency and in one of his discussion about the role of Baul songs in creating amity among Hindu and Muslim community remarked:

“Those who claim to be educated in my country have been searching a means as a necessity to create amity between Hindus and Muslims. They were taught and trained in the light of historical writings of the scholars of other countries. But till now in our country, one has to remember that amity is not revealed in necessity; rather the same is deeply rooted in the truth inside the inner core of the human being. In Baul literature and community, I found that adoration for harmony- it has unified both Hindus and Muslims without hitting each other. To promote this harmony, no meetings or organizational efforts were needed. The lyrical songs that created harmonious bindings between Hindus and Muslims, manifested in the rustic words and tune of the songs. No squabble occurred between Quran and Puran. This harmonious binding is the real unique characteristics of Indian civilization. We must remember that conflict leads to hostility and barbaric acts. In the deep conscience of rural Bengal as it is evident in Baul songs that how do stimulation of high civilization on its own, attempts to create a foundation for Hindu Muslim unity.”(As quoted by *ibid.* p 19). The above analysis of Rabindranath Thakur about Baul songs is equally applicable to Lalon songs and perhaps it is more valid in judging Lalon’s role in creating amity between people of all classes and castes.

From Lalon’s time till present day, extensive changes have occurred in the economic-social-political situation of the country. In the stream of time, changes also have taken place in the values, norms, outlook and taste of the people. But ironically till today, Baul songs and their practices are considered as the culture of backward people. Tastes and mental makeup of the present day society is yet to realize the proper values of Lalon songs or of Baul songs. For historical reasons the existence of this community is at a stake. In spite of these odds, there is necessity for evaluating Lalon’s songs and lyrics from sociological view point because of the historical and social importance of the same. Lalon through his songs and preaching, in the stream of social relations, identified the problems of caste and class differences, the idea of sacred and profane and in an implicit way showed the path to solve these problems. Thus in the above context it can be said that it is indeed important to realize the non-communal, socially conscious humanistic views that Lalon preached through his philosophy and mystic songs. Sociologically speaking, it can give a direction in understanding the basic propensity of life and living of the people of this land.

Lalon's role in 19<sup>th</sup> century Social movements has yet remained as an elusive phenomenon and needs to be explored. This is an important segment or part of his life and could be termed as a significant observable fact for constructing the social history of Bangladesh society. In this context this study is an initiative with a view to explore in depth Lalon's contribution as a charismatic social personality by critically judging his position in the history of social and religious movements of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and thus also is an attempt to portray Lalon in entirety and not in a fragmented way. .

In this study, efforts were given to contribute further in enhancing the existing knowledge in the field of Lalon's study in Bangladesh. The study has attempted to reveal impact of Lalon's social reformative works that have still been impacting the rural life of Bengal. In particular, this study has focused on Lalon's contribution in organizing rural downgraded mass people against social oppressions through his teaching and philosophical preaching in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

Critical analysis on Lalon's contribution in 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and its effect on contemporary social structure, social reaction concerning Lalon and his followers, could significantly enrich the existing literature on Lalon Shah. The studies so far have been carried out on Lalon Shah, are scattered between a numbers of approaches. In this context, a research explicitly focusing on 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and Lalon's role could provide a new dimension on the folk tradition of humanity of Bengal Society, spelled in the saying "...the ultimate truth is human being, nothing is more dignified than that of man".

### **3.0 Objective of the study**

The basic objective of the proposed study was to explore the impact of Lalon's ideas and philosophy that spread over 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. In order to cover this objective I have deliberately discussed on Lalon's society, social system, social customs and prejudice. I, at the same time, have focused on different social movements which were initiated in urban and rural area in nineteenth century Bengal and the influence of those movements in the changes of the society.

- Review the social, economic and historical background of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal ;
- Ascertain the Impact of British ascendance of Bengal;
- Assess the role of newly created Kolkata Based bourgeoisie class by the British raj;

- Determine the reasons for the emergence of different social movements in Bengal including Baulism as a cultic movement;
- Find out the historical needs for the emergence of Lalon in rural Bengal and his role as a reformer;
- Evaluate the role of Lalon and Baulism in organizing rural mass as a defiant group against the upper class interest;

#### **4.0 Scope of the Study**

The end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the entire period of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bengal witnessed unprecedented social upheaval and changes that left both positive and negative effects on its social structure. As has already been mentioned, the movements that steamed and later spread out in the then Bengal could be viewed from two different dimensions. One trend centered around and was led by the newly emerged English educated urban Hindu articulate bourgeois class of Kolkata and the others consisted of different religious armed movements and cult based movements which got momentum among the mass people of the rural Bengal as protests against oppression of upper caste Hindus zamindars and British rule.

All the measures that had been taken by the British colonial rulers helped in the emergence of new feudal nobility in Bengal. At the same time to serve the commercial interests of the British rulers, the City of Kolkata had gradually been developed under the patronage of the new rulers of India. Centering Kolkata an English educated Hindu middle class surfaced in Bengal, a class, which was formerly unknown. The collective effects of wealth and education created a type of social awakening among the urban Hindu upper class residents of Kolkata. Under their active patronage, different social and political institutions, organizations surfaced in Kolkata. Institutions like Hindu Mela, National Congress, Brahmmo Samaj etc played key roles in creating national awakening among the newly educated Hindu aristocracy and also to patronized and promote education and knowledge among urban Hindu population of Kolkata. During this period of history, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, introduced and established Brahmmo religious movement. Social reform movements by Viddyasagar and Ram Mohun also got momentum during the same period. Favorable wind started propelling in the arena of art and literature of Bengal centering Kolkata. The educational, political, social, cultural, literature, religious life, of Bengal became illuminated with the appearance of personalities like Ram Mohun Roy (1772-

1830), Radhakanta Dev(1783-1867), Derozeo(1809-1831), Debendranath Thakur(1817-1905), Biddyasagar(1820-1891), Modhushudan Dutta (1824-1873), Akkhya Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), Ramkrishna Poromhansa (1836-1886), Keshob Chandra (1838-1884), Bankimchandra(18938-1894) and later Rabindranath Thakur.

These initiatives taken by urban educated elite at the end, turned into social reform movements to protect the interests of the upper caste Hindus and Hinduism from the aggression of Christianity. Parallel to these urban based movements, more mass oriented, revolutionary movements aimed at emancipating the rural oppressed population irrespective of religion, caste and creed of Bengal had also swept the traditional mindset of people of the land and helped them to organize themselves against oppressive and discriminatory attitude of the British rulers and newly emerged elites most of whom were Hindus. In these endeavors of the rural mass, Baulism led by Lalon Shah the great saint of 19<sup>th</sup> century played a significant positive role in providing both psychological and social shelter for the poor wretched population of rural Bengal.

Lalon in course of time emerged as the most respected charismatic figures in leading the rural illiterate mass population in their march towards seeking emancipation from all oppression and discrimination. Thus the scope of this study remained limited to the analysis of these 19<sup>th</sup> century movements, both urban and rural and on the impact that these movements that they left on the social structure of Bengal in general and analysis of the Lalon's role in the social awakening of people in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal in particular. It is mentionable that among all the cult movements of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, Baulism was the most accepted cult religion among the rural population and Lalon Shah was and still is considered as the most important charismatic figure not only of the Baul community but also of other rural cult based religious movements in Bengal. Lalon emerged as an unparalleled leading figure in organizing the rural mass for their peaceful emancipation in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. Thus this study has attempted to analyze the role of Lalon as well as other sages and their movements in nineteenth century Bengal who at one stage of history could create favorable ambiance through their movements for the liberty of humanity.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Lalon Shah and Baulism are inseparable parts of the life and living of the rural people of Bangladesh. The history of Bangladesh is the history of long struggle against oppressive rulers and has a glorious history of communal harmony for thousands of years. At the same time, the



history of Bengal also could well be termed as a history of foreign domination. The long dominations of the land by different foreign rulers mostly were the history of persecution and oppression. This resulted into intermittent revolts by the mass people against the oppressors. Sometimes these revolts took the shape of armed struggle, and in some instances people tastily protested against the ruling elites by secluding themselves from the main current and by taking refuge under certain ideological movements. Some of these movements were led by self-proclaimed cult leaders who came forward to uplift the country's wretched population by organizing them under the umbrella of social reforms against oppressions and persecution. These unsung heroes of history always fought for the betterment of the society and played decisive role to free the people from subjugation. Lalon was one of such leaders who in the history of Bengal has long been regarded as the mystic Baul Samrat. Ironically, this very labeling as Baul Samrat meaning King of the Bauls alienated Lalon from the mainstream of the social history of Bengal. For long he has been deprived of the due recognition that he really deserves. A critical study of his social thought might open a new horizon of curiosity about this unsung hero of social history. This research is an effort to portray Lalon's social thought, social movement that led the proletariats of rural Bengal and their struggle against the oppressors and his contribution in bringing social change among the oppressed population of the society.

## **6.0 Review of relevant literature**

A number of studies have so far been conducted on Lalon both in home and abroad. These studies may be categorized on the basis of different approaches. Most of these studies attempted to put a religious identity and en-caste him as a Hindu or a Muslim. At the same time, some researches were carried out by exploring his philosophy in the traditional concept of Baul. Many researches attempted to explain the essence of his philosophy as a scripture of secret arduous practice of Baul community. Some of such studies on Lalon are reviewed in the following Para

One of the early studies and first mention of Lalon Shah was conducted by Kangal Harinath Majumder in 1872. In an article entitled "Jati" published in his magazine 'Saptahik Grambarta Prokashika'(part-10<sup>th</sup>, issue-17,first week of Bhadra-1279 B.S; page-3) Kangal Harinath identified Lalon as a religious preacher. It is note-worthily to mention` that this article was the first attempt to introduce Lalon in his life time before the reader. Kangal Harinath successively published three more critics before the readers on Lalon from 1872-1885. First in 1872 Kangal

Harinath Majumder depicts Lalon Shah sarcastically as one of the religious rebellions who's preaching was injurious to the then Hindu religion which generally expounded that, 'Everybody heard the name of Bramyasamaj. The people of lower class started another Sabha named Goursabha. It has no particular place to be held. The main preacher of Gourbadi Sabha attending in a village corner preached his sermon by reciting the verses of Gour. Hundreds of men and women attended the meeting. ... Lalon Shah, known as Kawastha innovated anothei Jati (religion). (Choudhury. A.A. 2009; p.152.

In 'Pakkhik Hitokori' a renowned local fortnightly magazine edited by great litterateur Mir Mosharraf Hussein a sub editorial 'Mahatma Lalon' (part-1<sup>st</sup>, issue-13, 17<sup>th</sup> october,1890)was published just after 14 days of his death.. Rai Charan Das/Biswas was the author of this documentary prose on Lalon. This write-up attempted put a religious veil on Lalon and identified him as Hindu belonging to 'Kayasta' caste. The prose elaborately sketched Lalon's caste, belief, social status and personal life based on hearsay.

Moulavi Abdul Wali remarked Lalon Shah as great 'versifier'. He in an ordinary general meeting of 'The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay' held on Wednesday, the 30<sup>th</sup>November 1898 read out a research paper on Lalon Shah entitled 'On some curious Tenets and practices of a certain class of Fakirs of Bengal.' This was published in article form in part-4, issue-5 of the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay in 1900. Moulana Abduul Wali in his article portrayed Lalon and his spiritual master 'Siraj Sai' as Muslims and describe the popularity of Lalon's verses among the mass people of rural Bengal(Hossain A. Ishahaq; Fakir Lalon Shah and His Songs' P.-543).

In 1925 Rabindranath Tagore meaningfully brought Lalon Shah before the civil society of Kolikata in the "Indian philosophical Conference". In his presentation Tagore compared Lalon Shah with the great sages of 'Upanishad' and dignified Lalon's poem as parallel to the poem of P.B Shelley. This evaluation of Lalon by Rabindranth, a positive trend was created among the intellectuals of Bengal about Lalon and a tremendous curiosity grew among them. A number of scholars of the then Bengal involved themselves in exploring Lalon and his philosophy. Further Rabindranath during his Europe tour from 1920 to 1921, through series lectures focused highly on Lalon/ Baul philosophy of Bengal. Following were the articles he presented in different countries of Europe on Lalon and the Bauls: 'Some Songs of the Village Mystics in Bengal' at Winmore Hall in Cambridge, England in 29<sup>th</sup> July in 1920, 'Some Village Mystics of

Bengal' (An Indian Folk Religion) at Church of free Christians in Amsterdam, England on 23<sup>rd</sup> in 1920, 'Village Mystics of Bengal' at 'Theosophical Society' in Amsterdam, England on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1920, 'Some Village Mystics of Bengal' at International School for Philosophy in Amsterdam, England on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1920, 'An Indian Folk Religion at Societe Amisde l'Orient in Paris, France on April, 1920 and ' The Village Mystics of Bengal' at German University 20<sup>th</sup> June in 1921 where he emphasized on the distinction on Baul songs and Baul Religion which later on compiled in his book 'Creative Unity'.

From a reasonable perspective and logical observation Dr. Md. Solaiman Ali Sarkar conducted his research works on Lalon's philosophy avoiding all contradiction about Lalon's caste, clan and religion. He tried to explore Lalon's real talent. Dr. Sarkar, from a neutral view point observed Lalon's philosophy and concluded about Lalon's position in the sphere of the world of philosophy. He made a very elaborate discussion about Baulism, source of Baulism, different esoteric Baul practices and Lalon's mystic philosophy. Dr. Sarkar viewed Lalon's philosophy compatible with the philosophy of Socratis, Ibn rkar Arabi, Rumi and Hafiz. in his books 'Baul Darshan' (1986), 'Banglar Baul Darshan (1992) and 'Lalon Shaher Maromi Darshan'(1994).

## CHAPTER 2

### Methodology

#### 2.0 Introduction

Research could be defined as the continual search for truth by applying scientific method. It is the quest for finding out the truth with the help of study, investigation, observation, comparison. Research also is a process of acquiring or discovering new knowledge “through diligent searching or investigation or by experimentation and interpreting the newly acquired knowledge”(Kothari, C.R :12.1994). Scientific method could be termed as a systematic body of procedures and techniques that are being applied in carrying out a research investigation or conducting experiment targeted at obtaining new knowledge. Thus it can be said that research and scientific methods could be considered a course of critical enquiry leading to discovery of facts or information.

The reliability and validity of any research depends to a great extent on the methodology that has been followed to conduct the research. Application of appropriate method is a precondition for carrying out any scientific research. Sociology as a scientific discipline also seeks knowledge about society through applying scientific methods. “The goal of sociological research is to test commonsense, assumptions, and replace false ideas with facts and evidences. The method that sociologists rely on is classified either as ‘Qualitative’ or ‘Quantitative’. Qualitative research rests on narratives and descriptive data, while, Quantitative research uses numerical data.” (Shepard and Green:38: 2001).

#### 2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research aims at in-depth exploration of facts and reasons that governs human behavior. The core of a qualitative research is based on the reasons behind different features of behavior. “Qualitative investigation focuses on the ‘why’ and ‘how’ aspects of decision making rather than ‘what’ and ‘where’ aspects of quantitative research”(Shepard and Green:38: 2001).

Thus, Qualitative research attempts to understand behavior and institutions by getting to know the persons involved in their values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and emotions. “Applying such perspective, one would, for example , study life history of a historical personality by immersing

oneself in analyzing the works of the person under study in the context of history rather than collecting data with a structured questionnaire” (Frankfort, C. and Nachimas , D : 272: 1992).

The basic tenet of qualitative research is, ‘it uses narratives or descriptive data rather than quantitative numerical data.’ It is possible to reveal some aspects of society by using qualitative method rather than by applying quantitative technique. In most cases all the methods that are being used in the qualitative research could be bracketed under the heading of “Field research”. Field research in qualitative study aims “to look at the aspects of social life that either is difficult or in no way can be measured quantitatively and needs to be understood in the natural setting”(Frankfort, C and Nachimas ,D:273:1992) Ironically, it is difficult to precisely define what is meant by qualitative research, as it does not use similar terminology as regular science. In simple words it may be stated that “qualitative method of conducting research includes collection of data and analysis of observations that are not expressible in numbers. In other words qualitative research emphasizes on quality. The term quality implies the essence or spirit of something” (Shepard and Green:38: 2001).

This research is an attempt to cover the life and teachings of Lalon Shah, a 19<sup>th</sup> century sage of Bengal Presidency under British rule. It is an attempt to analyze his teaching that shook the mind set of rural mass of Bengal in general, as well as to a great extent even to the newly emerged Kolkata based English educated gentry during that period. Even today, the appeal of Lalon’s philosophy did not fade away rather gradually is gaining momentum among all sections of people. The reason is his teachings uphold humane appeal, particularly for emancipating the down trodden people of the society.

It is thus not possible to measure quantitatively the impact of Lalon’s teaching and preaching on the mental sphere of the subaltern population as well as of the educated gentry of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Also it is not possible to quantify the reasons for which Lalon is still remembered with respect and why does a good number of present generation population is gradually leaning towards Lalon’s ideals in Bangladesh. Psycho social impacts of such issues are not quantifiable. As such I have basically applied qualitative method for conducting this research.

One of the important techniques of doing research by applying qualitative method is “Historical Analytical technique”. Research based on Historical Analytical technique needs in-depth analysis of historical facts and figures. Doing research based on historical data one need to be

able to understand the reality behind the historical events, need to understand the facts behind the facts.

The very nature of this research demands that the method of the study should be historical analytical, a technique that is often used in qualitative research. The reason for choosing the 'Historical Analytical' technique for conducting this research is- this research is basically an analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal and the narrative of the life and living of one of the great sage of the then Bengal named 'Lalon Shah.' The basic aim of this research is to narrate and analyze the aims and objectives of the social movements both in urban set up and rural Bengal and the role of Lalon Shah and Baulism as a movements in social awakening of the subaltern population of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, irrespective of class, caste and religion. Thus this research attempted to explore the role of Lalon Shah in social awakening, his ideas, feelings, and outlook and to find out how did 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal reacted to his preaching as well as how his movement differs from so called Bengali renaissance that ushered in centering the newly emerged landed aristocracy of Kolkata during that period. Also this research has compared Lalon's movement with other movements of the then rural Bengal also.

## **2.2 Historical Methods of Research**

19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal has immense significance in the overall historical development of Indian history. In fact it could well be said that 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal played the role of a catalyst in the emergence of modern India. Historical events are thus immensely important in conducting any research on 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. In fact to have an in depth knowledge on the background and growth of a chosen field of study, the process of learning and understanding can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends, and future possibilities. The historical method of research is applicable to all fields of study, because it encompasses their origins, growth, theories, personalities, crisis, etc. Both quantitative and qualitative variables can be used in the collection of historical information. "Historical methods of research could be defined as a process of systematically examining an account of what has happened in the past. It is not facts and dates or even a description of past events rather is the dynamic account of past events that involves an interpretation or attempt to recapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas of the same"(Wikepeidia:2016).

The basic goal of the historical research is to interpret the past events. For example, my research aims at answering questions about the life and preaching of Lalon Shah the famous personality

of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal history. To get my answer, I as the researcher had to look into the life and living of the Lalon, his teaching and preaching, interpretation of such preaching, how and why the contemporary population reacted favorably or negatively to such preaching and teaching, what were the consequences of such reaction, and so on. It is undeniable that a comparative historical perspective helps us see with greater clarity both ourselves and the social structure within which we carry out our lives. In recent years considerable progress has been made in the collection and preservation of historical materials. The historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence, such as secondary sources and tertiary sources to research, and then to write the findings. The question of the nature and indeed the possibility of sound historical method is raised in the philosophy of history, as a question of epistemology.

Historical methods of research could be classified as a scientific method because historical comparison is used to reveal the general and the particular in historical phenomena and attempts to gain an understanding of the various historical stages of development of one and the same phenomenon or of two different but contemporaneous phenomena. In this research I have attempted to reveal the historical role of Lalon Shah the sage of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal along with an attempt to understand the various historical stages of development during that period in the then Bengal.

It has already been mentioned earlier that the researcher usually apply historical method basically for reporting about events and or conditions that occurred in the past. By doing this a researcher made an attempt to establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events. In this research I did the systematic recounting of past events pertaining to the life and living of Lalon Shah by systematically arranging collected recorded information or knowledge about Lalon, a person whose teaching and preaching in many ways had have an effect on the 19<sup>th</sup> century mind set of the rural mass of Bengal society.

### **2.3 Techniques of Data Collection**

The major techniques that I followed to collect information on Lalon and on his preaching, teaching, life and livings as well as on the socio historical events of the period and as I mentioned earlier, were from secondary sources. I depended basically on gathering information from historical documents on 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal as well as on Lalon and Baulism. For the

purpose I had extensively reviewed relevant literature related to my research issue. Also I sought explanation of Lalon's own lyrics. For the purpose I did some Key Informant Interviews on some scholars and researchers those who have in-depth knowledge about Lalon and Baulism. The nature of these techniques for data collection is explained in detail below.

### **2.3.1 Literature Review**

“A literature review is a text of a scholarly paper, which includes the current knowledge including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic. Literature reviews are secondary sources, and do not report new or original experimental work. (ibid, P-56)

For reviewing relevant literature I surveyed books, scholarly articles, and other sources relevant to my particular research issues on 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and Lalaon Shah and by so doing, I tried to provide a description, summary, and critical evaluation of my findings in relation to my research problem being investigated. Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources I have explored while researching on my topic and also helped me to demonstrate before the readers how did my research fits within a larger field of study.

#### **2.3.1.1 Components of Literature review**

##### **For doing literature review I followed the following four stages**

- At the first stage I formulated my research problem by selecting the research topic or field and identified what are its component issues?
- In second stage I went for Literature search meaning finding materials relevant to the subject being explored
- During third stage I had to determine the concerned literatures that could make significant contribution to the understanding of my research topic
- In the last stage I analyzed and interpreted collected findings based on information gathered from reviewing pertinent literature and KII.



### **My Literature review was comprised of the following elements:**

- I did an overview of the subject, issue or theory under consideration for my research , along with the objectives of the literature review
- I made division of works under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative ideas entirely)
- I explored on how each work was similar to and how it varies from the others
- In conclusions I looked into my findings to assess which pieces could best be considered in their argument, are most convincing of their opinions, and make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of my area of research.

### **In assessing each piece of my findings, I put due consideration to:**

- Provenance—I meticulously tried to support my points of explanations and arguments in favor of my research finding by evidences (e.g. primary historical material, case studies, narratives, statistics, recent scientific findings)?
- Objectivity—As a researcher, I maintained to remain neutral as far as possible while dealing with my perspective. I also tried to dissect contrary data and was careful about certain pertinent information to prove my points?
- Persuasiveness—I remained careful about different findings of my thesis having most or least convincing sections.
- Value—I tried to put my arguments and conclusions in a convincing manner and hope this research work of mine would contribute in a significant way to an understanding of 19th century Bengal history and about Lalon Shah.

#### **2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews**

Key Informant Interview (KII) is a technique of data collection in Qualitative Research. Through KII researcher conduct interviews of people who have particularly informed perspectives on an aspect of the research topic being evaluated. In short “Key informant interviews are "qualitative, in-depth interviews of people selected for their first-hand knowledge about a topic of interest. The interviews are loosely structured, relying on a list of issues to be discussed. Key informant interviews resemble a conversation among acquaintances, allowing a free flow of ideas and

information. Interviewers frame questions spontaneously, probe for information and take notes, which are elaborated on later" (USAID 1996). I also applied KII technique for data collection on my research for the following reasons.

1. Decision-making on my research was possible to achieve, through qualitative and descriptive information.
2. In my research it was important to gain an understanding of the perspectives, behavior and motivations of Lalon's followers and scholars researching on Baulism and Lalon in order to explain the role of Lalon and Baulism in awakening the lower stratum population of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal

### **2.3.2.1 Advantages of KII**

- KII was an affordable way for me to gain a thorough knowledge on Lalon, Baulism and historical as well as social background of events in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.
- The information that I gathered through KII came from people who have relevant knowledge and insight.
- These helped me in generating new and unanticipated issues and ideas during the process of my research work.

## **2.4 Stages of the Research**

**Stage 1. Identification of Research Idea:** In stage 1 of the research the topic was finalized and the basic research question was formed. To get a clear idea on the background of the topic of research background literature review had been done. Based on the literature review, the research idea and research questions were refined. Identification and primary and secondary data sources were finalized and the authenticity and accuracy of source materials were done.

**Stage 2. Data Collection and Analysis :** In stage 2 of the research process, needed data for the research were collected analyzed and based on the collected information, a narrative exposition of the findings was done.

**Stage 3. Draft Report Preparation:** In stage 3 of the research, the research report or the dissertation was drafted based on the narrative exposition of the findings and was placed before the Research Guide.

**Stage 4: Final report Presentation:** In stage 4 of the research, the report was finalized after accommodating comments and directives of the guide and submitted to the appropriate authority for further action.

#### **2.4.1 Sources of Research Materials**

Field data collection for this research was done both from Primary and secondary sources.

**2.4.1.1 Primary Sources of Information** - Primary sources are the direct outcomes of events or the records of eye witnesses such as: a) Original documents b) Relics c) Remains d) Artifacts.

**2.4.1.2 Secondary Sources of Information-** Information provided by a persons who did not directly observe the event, object, or condition such as: a) Textbooks b) Encyclopedias c) Newspapers d) Periodicals e) Review of research and other references.

The historical analysis must be used in conjunction with other data sources. If we are to rely solely on few individual case histories to make our generalizations, criticism of our findings would be justified. In doing a historical research a researcher must recognize the extent to which historical events are unique, so also must the researcher should understand that an individual's life history to be idiosyncratic in some respects.

Used in conjunction with other techniques and data sources, however, life history provides a penetrating in-depth view of events, it is in this respect, an extension of traditional use of "key informants" in participant observation research is important. Used with proper caution, personal documents and life history reports will further our efforts to comprehend the intersection of history, individual biography, and social structure.

For this research I had to collect all information basically from secondary sources since Lalon's lyrics and teaching in written form had been documented by his disciples' long back. I studied the Lalon's lyrics that contain meaningful expression of reasons for human miseries, and available research reports, articles on Lalon published in the academic journals.

Also, I conducted several in depth studies on present day followers of Lalon Shah and and Baul Communities of both Bangladesh and West Bengal. These in depth studies helped me in getting exhaustive information on the socio-cultural practices, religious beliefs, rituals followed by the Bauls, who are the present day followers of Lalon. Besides, I also had informal discussion with several scholars who have been working on Lalon, his life and teaching. These discussions, provided information that helped me in formulating analytical frame work of my research.

## **2.5 Research Area**

The present study takes the events that took place in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal as its starting point, in order to grasp and understand the social movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and their role that impacted on the Bengal society and culture. I tried to examine what kind of social movements the Bengal history of 19<sup>th</sup> century had witnessed and what were their purposes? But my focal point of discussion was Lalon and his role in the context of the above movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

## CHAPTER 3

### Social Movement: A Theoretical and Conceptual frame

#### 3.0 Introduction

The term “social movement” is being used to denote wide verities of Conception. In fact, it is difficult to come to a scholarly consensus on the definition of ‘Social Movement’ and there probably will never be such a definition. The reason is, definitions inevitably reflect the theoretical assumption of the theorist. There are number of competing frame works in the field and each conceptualizes movements differently. Even scholars within the same "school" define movements differently depending on their particular theoretical formulation. Encyclopedia Britannica defines Social Movement as “loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society’s structures or values.” Social movements may differ in size but they all are essentially collective efforts and they are more or less products of spontaneous union of people. Though the relationships of this union cannot be defined by rules and procedures, but people in union merely share a common outlook (Encyclopedia Britannica). This means social movements, are basically “a groups of diffusely organized people striving towards a common goal relating to human society or social change, or the organized activities of such groups”(ibid). The mass upsurge during British rule in India or tacit protests against oppression, or attempts to reform the social behavior in Bengal during the same period are examples of social movements.

#### 3.1 Different Conceptual Views on Social Movements

In this section I attempted to examine various scholarly concepts related to social movements proposed by the different schools of thought. I also attempted to distinguish between conceptions about ‘Social Movement’ within a school when they differ fundamentally. Thus I explored conceptions of social movements embedded in Marxian, Weberian, Collective Behavior, Mass Society, Relative Deprivation and Resource Mobilization approaches.

##### 3.1.1 Marx’s views on Social Movement

Marx’s primary focus was in the causes and dynamics of revolutionary movements aimed at dismantling the capitalist system. He argued that movements grow out of basic social and

economic relations which establish the bases of power in a society. Thus, he concentrated his attention on explaining how capitalism generates the necessary conditions for a revolutionary reconstitution of capitalist societies. Marx viewed revolutionary movements as a natural consequence under capitalism, because capitalism contains and generates at end the economic structural contradictions. The main contradiction that would lead to efforts geared towards structural change is the existence of two classes with mutually exclusive interests. Marx argued that as they were faced with falling rates of profit, the capitalists--"owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labor would attempt to maintain their profits by increasing their rate of exploitation of workers because higher rates of exploitation mean higher rates of profit for them. Hence, it is in the interests of capitalists to exploit workers as much as possible. These diametrically opposed interests produce inherent class antagonisms which culminate in to a revolutionary conflict between workers and capitalists. Workers; the revolutionary class would engage in several stages of activity to resist further efforts of exploitation. Initially workers would constitute an incoherent mass in which individual workers experience self-estrangement and powerlessness. Gradually through organizing themselves into a 'class for itself' the workers through revolutionary movement will succeed in overthrowing the capitalist system and establish 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The proletariat after successful revolution against the bourgeoisie, would gain control over the means of production, do away with the bias of class antagonisms—private ownership of the means of production—and class conflict dissipates.'"(Marx and Engels, Collective Works,1968:35)

Marx's theory calls attention to a number of factors often overlooked by alternative theories of social movements. For example, he linked inequality and other properties of the society to the rise of revolutionary movements. He pointed out the centrality of interests, especially class interests. Thus, he made the case that participation in movements is a rational, purposive activity. Marx also emphasized the necessity of internal organization and net working. And finally, by portraying how movements are products of the societies in which they arise, Marx showed that revolutionary movements are not abnormal occurrences unconnected to the larger society. Because of its focus on class, however, some criticize Marx's analysis as having limited explanatory power for social movements where other factors play prominent role.

### 3.1.2 Max Weber's View

**Max** Weber the proponent of charismatic authority, provides an overview of his conception of charismatic movements. He conceptualized the charismatic movement as a social change force. In favor of his claim he argued that "within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force"(Weber, M. 1947:362). Furthermore Weber stated "in a revolutionary and sovereign manner, charismatic domination transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms"(Weber, M. 1968:115).

For Weber, the struggle for power and change are the main focus of charismatic movements. Charismatic movements originate in social systems that undergo in great stress and are unable to meet the needs of a significant number of people (Weber, 1968:1121). In view of Weber, "Charismatic leaders are paramount because their extraordinary personal qualities lead people in stressful situations to treat them as if they possess upper human powers. The charismatic leader attracts followers because they identify with his divine mission believing that its realization translates into their own wellbeing" (ibid). This is why the leader's personal magnetism and world view serve as their driving force and pulls people into the charismatic community where they establish an emotional and communalistic form of existence.

Weber viewed charismatic movements as "non-routine forms of collective action that emerge outside of pre-existing social organizations, norms, and bureaucracies"(ibid). Such movements are inherently unstable because the "pure charismatic element provide them with resources and solidarity only during their early stages"(ibid). Hence, Weber advanced a life cycle scheme arguing that "if charismatic movements are to endure they must routinize their activities because of economic, administrative, and leadership succession problems they inevitably face. When routinization occurs, the charismatic movement establishes a sound organizational base and become integrated into the society"(ibid).

Weber's analysis calls attention to 1) charismatic leadership, 2) belief systems, 3) social systems undergoing stress, 4) routinization of charismatic authority, and 5) the revolutionary nature of charismatic movements.

### 3.1.3 Collective Behavior View

Collective behavior theorists view social movements as efforts for non-institutionalized social change (Jenkins1983;529). Blumer (1951:199) defined "social movements as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life" and maintained that "in the beginning, a social movement remains amorphous, poorly organized and without form. Languard Lang (1961:490) defined the social movement as "a large-scale, widespread, and continuing, elementary action in pursuit of an objective that effects and shapes the social order in some fundamental aspect. Finally, Turner and Killian [1972:246] define a social movement as: "Collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is apart. As a collectivity a movement is a group within definite and shifting membership and with leadership whose position is determined more by the informal response of the members than by formal procedures for legitimizing authority".

Turner (1981:3) wrote "the primary focus of interests for students of collective behavior is the social movement as a sociological phenomenon and as a form of collective behavior." Therefore, "the movement in collective behavior approaches is conceptualized as a phenomenon *suigeneris* with its own properties, processes, and internal logic." In short, collective behaviorists view social movements as non-routine forms of collective action geared toward social change. They cannot, Turner explained by prior social organization, norms, and culture work out for a social movement, because movements are emergent forms that acquire organization during their lifecycles. Once such forms become institutionalized they cease to be objects of inquiry as social movements. The tasks then are to identify the origins of movements; investigate how they give rise to change; analyze the fluid processes, dynamics, life cycles of movements; and group movements into comprehensive classificatory schemes.

### 3.1.4 Mass Society View

Mass society theorists view social movements as phenomena which occur when previously unorganized individuals band together to change some part of their social milieu (Kornhauser,1959;Arendt,1951;Lipset,1963;Hoffer,1951;Cantril,1941;King,1956). Mass society definitions of movements are not vastly different from those of collective behaviorists. For example, King (1956:27) defines a social movement as" a group venture extending beyond



a local community or as local event and involving a systematic effort to inaugurate changes in thought, behavior, and social relationships," and Toch (1965:5) defines a social movement as "an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem they feel they have in common."

Mass society theorists usually emphasize the characteristics of "mass societies" which make movements possible: cultural confusion, social heterogeneity, weak cultural integration mechanisms, and a lack of attachments to secondary groups structures. Thus, they are less likely than collective behaviorists to examine movements directly. Instead, they analyze the properties of societies, specify the "personality traits" and psychological states which those societies produce, and explain how these factors generate movements. Their conception of social movements calls attention to the interface between social structure and personality.

### **3.1.5 Blumer's Four Stages of Social Movements**

It has already been stated earlier that social movement process has been studied by many scholars. One of the prominent scholar to study social movement in the earlier period was Herbert Blumer. Blumer proposed four stages lifecycles of social movements. These are: "social ferment," "popular excitement," "formalization," and "institutionalization". The concept proposed by Blumer in course of time has been refined by scholars and they renamed these stages keeping the underlying themes relatively constant. The four stages of social movement are known today as: (De la Porta&Diani 2006, p.150):

- Emergence,
- Coalescence,
- Bureaucratization, and
- Decline.

The term decline used for the last stage apparently may sound negative; but not necessarily it needs to be understood in negative sense. Social movements as different scholars have noted may decline for several reasons and identified five ways through which social movements do decline. These are Success, Organizational failure, Co-optation, Repression, or Establishment within mainstream society (Macionis, 2001; Miller, 1999).

### *3.1.5.1 Stage 1: Emergence*

The first stage of the social movement life cycle is known as the stage of ‘emergence’. Blumer described this stage as the “social ferment” stage (De la Porta & Diani, 2006). Within this stage, “social movements are very preliminary and there is little to no organizational set up. In this stage widespread discontent exist (Macionis, 2001; Hopper, 1950). The potential movement participants of this stage may be unhappy with some policy or some social condition, but usually do not taken any action in order to redress their grievances. But if by chance they take any action it is most likely to be an individual action rather than a collective one. For example a participant of the movement could pass a comment to friends and family members that he or she is dissatisfied with the existing conditions or could write a letter to the local newspaper or representative. But these actions are individual actions not strategic or collective action. Further, there may be an increase in media coverage of negative conditions or unpopular policies which may contribute in creating general sense of discontent. This early stage can also be considered within a specific social movement organization (SMO). “A social movement organization is an organization that is or has been associated with a social movement and which carries out the tasks that are necessary for any social movement to survive and be successful (ibid).” If we look at the 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal we could observe the similar situation. Initially, the urban Kolkata based movements were basically anxious to protect Hinduism from the clutch of Christian aggression putting the veil of reform. These movements were limited mostly in the writings and individual efforts to contain Hinduism and later developed into SMO. Examples of Kolkata centric urban social movement organizations were Brahmo Andolon, Satidaho Nibaron Andolon, Young Bengal Movement and so on. On the other hand, the rural based movements in the then Bengal had two different trends. One trend emerged as violent armed protest against British rule such as Fakir and Sannyashi Bidrioho, Farazi Andolon, peasant Revolyt in Pabna. The others were tacit in nature and basically appeared as cultural protest against all social injustice. Examples of such tacit movements were the cultic movements of Bengal of which Baul movement was the most prominent one. These were the main social movement organizations that had been organized during British rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal. Within the emergence stage, in an SMO, its members serve as agitators. Agitators raise consciousness around issues and help to develop the sense of discontent among the general population. An example of this stage would be the Fakir Andolon, or Farazi Andolon. The participants through armed struggle wanted to

establish Darul Islam (Dwelling of Peace) in Bengal and India by overthrowing British rule of Darul Harb (Dwelling of Chaos). These movements emerged in a situation when among the local population of the then Bengal, a general and long standing sense of discontent against the British rule in India had been growing fast. Besides the above armed movements, also there were SMOs like that of the minor religious movements such as Baulism, Kartabhoja, Sahebhdhani and Balahari, minor religious movements also were defiant in character against the existing social norms and values controlled by the upper class ruling elites. But their defiance were not violent in organizing mass people, but were peaceful rejection of the upper class rules and regulations. These movements continued and formed the Minor Religious Movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal.

### *3.1.5.2 Stage 2: Coalescence*

The second stage of social movement is the stage of Coalescence. At this stage, in its onward stride, social movements could overcome some obstacles. Often, social unrest or discontent passes without any organizing efforts or by wide spread mobilization. For example, people in a community may complain to each other about a general injustice, but they do not come together to act on those complaints, and as a consequence social movement fail to progress to the next level. Stage two, is known as coalescence, or the “popular stage.” This stage is characterized by a more clearly defined sense of discontent. It is no longer just a general sense of unease, but become a general concern about what the unease is and who or what is responsible for the unease. Rex D. Hopper (1950), while examining the revolutionary processes, states that at this stage “unrest is no longer covert, endemic, and esoteric; it becomes overt, epidemic, and exoteric. Discontent is no longer uncoordinated and individual; it tends to become focalized and collective” (p. 273). Further he states “this is the stage when individuals participating in the mass behavior of the preceding stage become aware of each other” (p. 273). At this point leadership emerges and strategies for success are worked out. Also, at this stage, mass demonstrations may occur in order to display the social movement’s power and to make clear demands. Most importantly this is the stage at which the movement becomes more than just random upset of stay individuals; at this point they are now organized and strategic in their outlook. All the movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal both rural and urban again provide good examples of this stage.

After the initial emergence, movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal began a series of high profile campaigns, which sought to highlight either the problems of protecting Hinduism from the aggression of Christianity in urban Kolkata or the plight of mass people under British rule. These campaigns included the new interpretation of Vedas by Ram Mohun Roy, or attack against caste based Hinduism by Young Bengal or armed rebellion against British raj by different organized armed group or defiant cultural movements in the form of religious preaching like Baulism. These events galvanized supports for the movements and displayed the brutality to which British and their local agents would resort in order to protect their interests. At this point too, prominent leaders of the movement begin to emerge, such as Ram Mohun Roy, IswarchandraVidyaasagr, Derozio, in Kolkata and Haji Shariyatullah, Fakir MaznuSha, Titumir, and Lalon Shah in rural Bengal. After hard fought campaigns and strong leadership, some of the movements became a more prominent political force and some failed.

### *3.1.5.3 Stage 3: Bureaucratization*

The third stage of social movement is the stage of bureaucratization. This stage was defined by Blumer as “formalization,” (De la Porta&Diani, 2006) and is characterized by higher levels of organization and coalition based strategies. In this stage, social movements have had some success in that they have raised awareness to such a degree that a coordinated strategy is necessary across all of the SMOs. Similarly, “SMOs will come to rely on staff persons with specialized knowledge that can run the day-to-day operations of the organization and carry out movement goals. Social movements, in this stage, can no longer just rely on mass rallies or inspirational leaders to progress towards their goals and build constituencies; they must rely on trained staff to carry out the functions of organizations”(ibid). In this phase, the political and social power of the movement becomes greater than in the previous stages. At this stage the movement could have more regular access to political or social elites. Social movements thus become bureaucratize in this way and end up fizzling out because it is difficult for members to sustain the emotional excitement necessary and because continued mobilization becomes too demanding for participants.” (Macionis, 2001; Hopper, 1950). Most of the social movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century including Bualism could be put forward as good examples of movements that had passed through this stage. The movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal moved from agitation and demonstrations to having many formal organizations that would work toward the goals of either

protecting upper Hindu class interest or establishing just society based on humanism like Baul movement under the leadership of Lalon Shah or for making coalition to uproot British rule in India. Some of these organizations were Brahmo Samaj, Farazi, Baul. If they did not form these bureaucratic organizations, many movements would have most likely faded away and their demands would have gone unmet.

#### *3.1.5.4 Stage 4: Decline*

Finally, the last stage in the social movement life cycle is decline, or institutionalization. Decline does not necessarily mean failure for social movements. Miller (1999) argues, there are four ways in which social movements can decline:

- Repression,
- Co-optation,
- Success, and
- Failure,

Others have added establishment with mainstream as another way in which they decline (Macionis, 2001).

#### *Repression*

The decline of any social movements can occur due to repression of the authorities, or agents acting on behalf of the authorities. The authorities use multiple techniques which often are violent in nature to control a social movement if that goes against the interest of the authority. Further, Miller (1999) states “repressive actions may be defined as legitimate by the state...but they are actually illegitimate from the perspective of the movement” (p. 305). For example, governments could often pass laws outlawing specific movement activities or organizations, or justify attacks on them by declaring them somehow dangerous to public order. This type of repression makes it exceedingly difficult for social movements to carry out their activities and recruit new members. Most of the social movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal had to face such repression from the British government with exceptions of Kolkata based movements. Others had to face severe repression from British government. Sometimes the British repression went to the extent of annihilation of the supporters of a movement. Examples of such state repression of social movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal could be British war expeditions against armed

rebellion of Bengal. In case of Baulism, the resistance came from within the social set up. Both Hindu and Muslim orthodox groups during that period stood against Baulism and Lalon to wipe them out. But, Lalon's courage, devotion and leadership helped Baulism to sustain in the soil of Bengal.

### *Co-optation*

Movements can also decline, if their organizations are highly dependent on centralized authority or on charismatic leadership, through co-optation. Co-optation occurs when movement leaders attempt to associate authorities or the movement itself targets more than with the constituent of the social movement core target. For example, a leader could be bribed to work against the organization to jeopardize the target of a movement. Leaders could also be paid off by authorities or target groups who ask them to redirect their activities in exchange.

### *Success*

One cannot generalize that all social movements end in defeat because of repression or co-optation. Some movements decline and some also become successful. Smaller, localized movements with very specific goals often have a better chance at outright success. Many social movements have goals that are much less clearly defined and many organize new campaigns once others a wrap up either through success or compromise.

### *Failure*

In his analysis of the decline of movements, Miller (1999) notes that movements may decline for many reasons stated above, but he also argues that when a movement fails to handle the rapid expansion because of its success and due to organizational strain, it may collapse into different factions. Failure of social movements due to organizational or strategic failings is common for many movements. When failure occurs at the organizational level, Miller argues, it is usually for two reasons; (i) Factionalism and (ii) Encapsulation.

As the movement grew, partly due to its open structure in which everybody was encouraged to take part in the decision making process, the organization began to be controlled by different factions that were operating within the organization for the benefit of outside organizations. As the factionalism grew worse and repression continued, Miller argues that "groups became

increasingly insular, leading to encapsulation. This is the process wherein a cadre of activists become isolated from the broader movement because they come to share many of the same habits and culture and their ideology becomes more similar to one another's and at the same time more rigid. They become so dedicated to the movement that they fail to sympathize with those who do not make the movement the dominant aspect of their life. Likewise, potential recruits find it hard to penetrate the close knit group" (Miller, 1999).

### *Establishment with Mainstream*

Others have noted that a fifth reason for decline exists; mainly, that an organization becomes established with the mainstream. That is, their goals or ideologies are adopted by the mainstream and there is no longer any need for a movement. (Macionis, 2001).

### **3.1.5.5 Applications**

Sociologists can use the theory of the four stages of social movements as an analytic tool for understanding how collective action occurs. Since 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal varied so greatly in individual goals and appearance that these could be placed within a common framework in order to determine how these social movements affected Bengal society on a wide scale and what role Baulism under Lalon played. Attempts could also be made to apply this model of analysis to analyze specific social movements like that of Bualism under Lalon and other urban and rural contemporary movements in the then Bengal to see, whether these movements could succeed to achieve their goals in effective ways or not. For example, movements in the coalescence stage can anticipate the need to advance into the next level of development, bureaucratization, and can act accordingly to increase their power and influence. The four stages of social movement development can also help scholars understand the ways that social movements affect society. By analyzing social movements that occur at given points and stages, I tried to gain insight into the workings of society and the changes it undergoes - a fundamental component to the work of sociologists. For example, looking at the periods of emergence and coalescence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century social movements in Bengal present the way to observe how society has changed as a result of these movements. In addition, we can better understand the events that occur at various stages in the social movement in retrospect as part of a process or change, rather than as individual events.

### 3.1.6 Relative Deprivation View

Unlike collective behaviorists and mass society theorists, relative deprivation proponents have not focused attention on social movements, *per se*. Rather, they studied episodes of political violence and revolution'. Thus their interest were more limited than collective behaviorists and mass society theorists. Gurr (1970:3-4), a leading proponent of relative deprivation, states that his research was concerned with political violence "all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, it is" acrostics policies." He further elaborates on the forms of political violence with which he is concerned:

- "Turmoil: Relatively-spontaneous, unorganized political violence with substantial popular participation, including violent political strikes, riots, political clashes, and localized rebellions;
- "Conspiracy: Highly organized political violence with limited participation, including organized political assassinations, small-scale terrorism, small-scale guerrilla wars, coups d'état and mutinies;
- "Internal war: Highly organized political violence with widespread popular participation, designed to overthrow the regime or dissolve the state and accompanied by extensive violence, including large-scale terrorism and guerrilla wars, civil wars, and revolutions" (ibid p.11).

Thus, most behaviors discussed in relative deprivation Literature qualify as "social movement" activity. Moreover, theorists using the relative deprivation frame work have also analyzed social movements (e.g., Pettigrew, 1964). Because relative deprivation perspectives focus on the "genesis of political violence instead of social movements, there are two points to keep in mind: relative deprivation examine the genesis of political violence but do not focus on the dynamics of such violence; and they focus on political violence, while not analyzing other forms of political protest"(ibid).

### 3.1.7 Resource Mobilization View

Resource mobilization approaches have produced different conceptions than those reviewed above and substantially different conceptions of movements exist within the school. To capture the external and internal differences I shall try to focus on the approaches of Mc Carthy-Zaldand Tilly.



McCarthy and Zald have formulated an organizational-entrepreneurial model of social movements. In their view, (1977:1217-18), "a social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society." This definition excludes both organizational factors and the struggle for power. Indeed, the definition implies that latent movements are forever present in societies because no society lacks individuals who possess preferences for change.

McCarthy and Zald stated "a social movement is nothing but a structural preference directed towards social change" (1977:1218). For McCarthy-Zald the social movement can serve as one unit of analysis, because analysts may investigate "who holds the beliefs" and/or "how intensely are they held?" But different units of analyses are needed to explain open conflict, mobilization, or outcomes of collective action. To understand those issues the unit of analysis shifts to movement organizations, industries, sectors, and entrepreneurs. Later McCarthy-Zald utilizes added additional units of analysis when they investigate the dynamics between various groups and preference structures for changes. Their definition of movements, however, differs sharply from previous ones by explicitly excluding actual conflict, mobilization, and social change activities.

Charles Tilly (1973) advances a "political process" view of movements "arguing that collective action derives from population central political processes. Tilly (1979:12) defines a social movement as: "A sustained series of interactions between national power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support".

For Tilly "the focus is sustained interactions rather than the" social movement" as a phenomenon *sui generis*". Tilly (1978:49) breaks from previous definitions by refusing to treat the social movement as the unit of analysis, arguing instead that a movement is not a group that emerges and transforms over time.

Tilly roots the concept of 'social movement' in historical time and space. "The social movement is argued to be a nineteenth-century creation generated by the nationalization of politics and the rise of special purpose associations. During that century political parties, unions, and other associations became the chief vehicles through which groups struggled for power and institutionalized their interests"(ibid).Tilly argues that "these people constitute social movements and like their institutionalized counterparts, they struggle for national power through special purpose associations." What distinguishes social movements from their institutionalized counterparts "is their political situation which causes them to rely heavily on a repertoire of disorderly tactics such as strikes, demonstrations, and violence and protest meetings to accomplish political ends." For Tilly "Nevertheless, social movements and formal political parties are mirror images because both are political actors pursuing power. In short, both set of actors are propelled by the same political process wherein the social movement is a party with the road aspirations and a unifying the life system and the political party is the aimed, nationalized social movement"(Tilly1979:11).

Tilly pointed out two views of a movement: that of national power structures and that of movement participants. Social movements from the "perspective of national power structures are coherent phenomena; they exists along as they offer a challenge to dominant interests and beliefs." But" seen from the bottom up, (social movements) are usually much more fragmented and heterogeneous: shifting factions, temporary alliances, diverse interests, a continuous flux of members and hangerson" (Tilly1979:19).The task of the analyst therefore, has three points:

- 1) investigate the response of power holders to social movements. Especially their ability to protect their interests through repression, forming coalitions, bargaining, and cooptation.
- 2) investigate the dynamics through which movement actors advance their interests by creating the illusion of unity, mobilizing large numbers of supporters, and making strategic choices and
- 3) combine these two perspectives into a dynamic analysis of collective action.(ibid)

### **3.1.8 Frame Analysis**

Frame analysis (also called framing analysis) is a multi-disciplinary social science research method. The concept is generally attributed to the work of Erving Goffman and his (1974) book 'Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience.' The concept has been developed to analyze social movement theory, policy studies. In the social sciences, 'framing' denote a set

of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies, organize, perceive, and communicate about reality. Framing entails social construction of a social phenomenon – by mass media sources, political or social movements, political leaders, or other actors and organizations. It could be termed as an inevitable process of selective influence over the individual's perception of the meanings attributed to words or phrases. Broadly “framing can be viewed in one of two ways: as ‘frames in thought’, through which mental representations, interpretations, and simplifications of reality is made and ‘frames in communication’, that consists of communication of frames between different actors” ((Bateson1972,Tversky & Kahneman1981).

### **3.1.8.1 Framing and Social Movement**

During past few decades, sociologists have been emphasizing on the “development of the concept of frames to explain how individuals identify and understand social events and which norms they should follow in any given situation” (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). To be more specific for Goffman, frames denoted “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (Goffman 1974). For example as a researcher my topic of research itself immediately provided me with a conceptual template on what social movement is and what should a social movement looks like. In fact hardly in my mind I thought about social movement as something like a bunch of people gathered in a club house for enjoyment or an organization of the professional group in a meeting discussing about a problem in their establishment. However, considering bunch of people gathered together in a club or an organizational behavior could provide with an entirely different behavior template. It would be perfectly acceptable for me consider a club or an organization as social movements entirely from a different perspective. Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and there by function to organize experience and guide action.

One of such frames is ‘Collective Action Frame’. Collective action frames also perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there,” but in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner by stander supports, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford 1988:198). Thus, collective action frames are

action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (ibid: 199). A crucial feature that distinguishes collective action frames from schema and other related cognitive constructs is that “collective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning” (Gamson 1992a:111). I applied Collective Framing model in analyzing my research findings.

### **3.1.8.2 Core Framing Tasks**

Collective action frames are constructed in part as movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change. Building on Wilson’s (1973) stated this as decomposition of ideology.. Snow & Benford (1988) refer to these core framing tasks as “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing.” By pursuing these core framing tasks, movement actors attend to the interrelated problems of “consensus mobilization” and “action mobilization” (Klandermans 1984). In other words, the former fosters or facilitates agreement where as the latter fosters action, moving people from the balcony to the barricades.

### **3.1.8.3 Categories of Frame**

Social movements use three kinds of frames (Snow and Benford 1988) to further their goals. The first type is ‘diagnostic framing’.

#### ***Diagnostic Framing***

Diagnostic framing portray the problem clearly and in an understandable way. When diagnostic frames are applied, it keeps no shades of gray: instead, its aim is based on the assumption that what “they” do is wrong and this is how “we” will fix it ((Hall 1982). Some of the 19th century social movements in rural Bengal could be analyzed with this diagnostic framing. The different movements that steamed in the rural Bengal in different names under different leadership were basically anti-British movements of the farmers who had a feeling that British colonial rule ruined their social and economic life and as such the only solution is to overthrow Company Raj

by armed struggle. These armed movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal could be the examples of diagnostic framing with their uncompromising insistence that only solution for their social and economic emancipation is to overthrow Company Raj through armed struggle. Again if we consider the Urban Movements centering Kolkata were basically reform movements to protect the young emerging educated middle class for the aggression of Christianity. Again if we take Baul movement, the frame was to protect poor wretched population from the repression of the religious bigotry through defiant ideological maneuver.

### *Prognostic Framing*

Prognostic framing is the second type of frame. It offers a solution and states how it will be implemented. For example Kolkata based social movements like ‘Brahmo Samaj Andolon’, ‘Satidaha Protha Nibaron Andolon’, ‘Young Bengal Movement’ etc are some examples of this frame. When looking at the issues of these movements, it can be observed that these are framed in social reform movements that included the plan to reform the existing religious and social norms to basically protect Hindu upper caste youths from the aggression of Christianity. It needs to be mentioned here that there may be many competing prognostic frames even within social movements adhering to similar diagnostic frames. Baul movement under Lalou sought emancipation of poor people not in worldly religions but on one’s own self. Their basic idea was ‘man himself is the ultimate truth and nothing is superior to that of human being’. This helped them to self development and taught the followers self respect and created a revolutionary change in the mental sphere of the subaltern population in rural Bengal that helped them to realize about the value of life and living.

### *Motivational Framing*

Finally, ‘Motivational Framing’ is the call to action: what should be done once agreed with the diagnostic frame and believes in the prognostic frame. These frames are action-oriented. For example, in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural social movements were a call for actions that encouraged rural peasants to take active part in the uprising against the Company Raj, or conversely, to go for a motivational campaign like Kolkata based urban movements to propagate their viewpoint that all human are equal or Satidaha is an inhuman system and so on and through changing the mindset of the people through motivational campaign. Baulism also could be accommodated in

Motivational framing. Baulism emerged as a movement of the subaltern population and they believed that everywhere in the society poor population of the lower stratum have always been harassed , humiliated and exploited severely by the minority elite class because of their social position in a rigid caste based social system. They passively started protests against the norms and values of the elite classes, against their atrocities through preaching and believing in their own system of beliefs and rituals. These beliefs and rituals of the Bauls helped them to form closed integrated group to fight against all discrimination against the oppressed mass and oppressive elites. They denied the very existence of a supreme power, the main moral foundation of the elite class and declared the supremacy of human being instead of an all powerful God. Lalou in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared in the juncture of social change in Bengal. By his mesmerizing charismatic power he organized Bauls as powerful integrated group who preached humanity against religious bigotry and bestowed the mass people with hopes of peaceful life and living. Baul movement could very well be fitted in Motivational framing.

With so many similar diagnostic frames, it is sometimes wise to join together to maximize their impact. When social movements link their goals to the goals of other social movements and merge into a single group, a ‘frame alignment process’ (Snow et al. 1986) occurs—an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to the movement.

#### **3.1.8.4 Frame Alignment**

This frame alignment process involves four aspects: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. Bridging describes a “bridge” that connects uninvolved individuals and unorganized or ineffective groups with social movements that, though structurally unconnected, nonetheless share similar interests or goals. All the movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal had one goal in common that is emancipation of mass population from the exploitation of the ruling class. For example Farazi Movement in rural Bengal was apparently led by the Muslims to uphold the dignity of Islam and Muslims. But history tells us that it ultimately became a common platform to bridge peasants belonging to all classes, caste and religion to join hands together against Company Raj and their local agents. Baul movement also had the similar objective to emancipate exploited mass. Thus people from all sections joined together and created new, stronger social movement organization with an aim for social and economic liberation of the mass population.

### **3.1.8.5 Amplification Model**

At the first phase of the social movement, organizations seek to expand their core ideas to gain a wider, more universal appeal. By expanding their ideas to include a broader range, they can mobilize more people for their cause. For example, all the peasant movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal or Baul movement in rural Bengal under Lalou, or Urban movements in Kolkata extended their arguments in support of their movements. In the ‘amplification model’ the basic ideas of the armed movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal was to get rid of the Company Raj for their economic and social emancipation or passive Baul movements against caste based society to protect the down trodden population from the ruling elites, or Kolkata based movements to protect Hinduism from Christian aggression through introducing new explanation of religion. All these are examples of amplification model.

### **3.1.8.6 Extension**

Social movements agree to mutually promote each other, even when the two social movement organization’s goals do not necessarily relate to each in achieving immediate goal. This often occurs when organizations are sympathetic to each others’ causes, even if they are not directly aligned. For example in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal as stated earlier, different movements steamed under different leadership such as Fakir Andolon under a Muslim named Fakir Maznu Shah or Sanyasi Bidroho under Bhabani Pathak . Though their immediate goals were different but the basic objective was the same and one-to drive out the Company Raj from the soil of the country. This is call “extension.”

### **3.1.8.7 Transformation**

‘Transformation’ is a face in framing social movement that involves a complete revision of goals. Once a movement has succeeded, it risks losing relevance. If it wants to remain active, the movement has to change with the transformation or risk becoming obsolete. For instance, when Brahmo movement could finally overcome the threat of Christianity gradually it became obsolete. Likewise with the taking over of Indian administration by the British Imperial power from the East India Company, gradually all the movements against the Company rule subsided. In short, it is an evolution to the existing diagnostic or prognostic frames generally involving a total conversion of movement.

With the help of the frame theory, it is easy to accommodate all types of movements that emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. I have discussed the issues of analyzing the movements by using Frame theory above. This is why, I have accommodated frame theoretical analysis for analyzing the theme components of my research dissertation.



## CHAPTER 4

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Social Movements in Bengal

#### 4.0 Introduction

During the period from the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and entire period of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bengal witnessed unprecedented social upheaval and changes that left both positive and negative effects on its social structure. The movements that steamed and later spread out in the then Bengal could be viewed from two different dimensions. One trend was centered around and led by the newly emerged urban Hindu middle class of Kolkata and the others consist of different rural based movements mostly clad with religious ideology and got momentum among the mass people of the rural Bengal. The urban movements were led by newly emerged British educated new middle class of Kolkata. The rural movements had two different dimensions, one trend mostly emerged as religious movements and later transformed into armed struggles against upper caste Hindus, newly created landed aristocracy the Zamindar and against British rule. The second trend was a kind of deviant actions of the subaltern population in the form of cult movements against oppressive role of the ruling religion, social customs and ruling elites. In this Chapter I have attempted to analyze the Kolkata based movements of the urban elites and the so called religious movements that finally turned into armed revolts against the British rule and their local agents the Zaminders. In next chapter I have detailed out about the cult movements that had tremendous impact on the mental sphere of the poorest segments of the rural society in Bengal.

#### 4.1 Emergence of Kolkata based Urban Social Movements

The measures taken by the British colonial rulers for consolidating their imperial rules, paved the way for the emergence of new feudal nobility in Bengal. This new elite class was created with active supports of the British authority to serve the commercial interests of the British rulers. British rulers at the initial phase of their colonial expansion, extended full supports to the Hindus and showed utter negligence towards Muslim subjects from whom they snatched power of ruling India. Alongside the city of Kolkata gradually emerged under the direct patronage of the new rulers in India. Centering Kolkata and under British patronage, an English educated wealthy Hindu middle class surfaced in Bengal, a class, which was formerly unknown.

The collective effects of wealth and education created a kind of social awakening among the urban Hindu upper class residents of Kolkata. Different social and political institutions, organizations like Hindu Mela, National Congress, Brahmmo Samaj movement and so on surfaced in Kolkata under the leadership of this newly educated Hindu middle class created by the British rulers. These institutions had played key roles in creating national bourgeoisie awakening among the newly educated Hindu aristocracy. These organizations also patronized in promoting western education and knowledge among urban population of Kolkata. In this juncture of Bengal's history, Raja Rammohun Roy, introduced and established his Brahmmo religious movement. During the same period Social reform movements by Vidyasagar also got momentum. Derozio and his followers known as Young Bengal appeared in the scene with all their vigor against bigotry and Hindu religious dogmas. Favorable wind started propelling in the arena of art and literature of Bengal centering Kolkata. The educational, political, social, cultural, literature, religious life, of Bengal became illuminated with the appearance of personalities like Rammohun (1772-1830), Radhakanta Dev(1783-1867), Derozeo(1809-1831), Debendranath Thakur(1817-1905), Vidyasagar(1820-1891), Modhushudan Dutta (1824-1873), Akhya Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), Ramkrishna Poromhansa (1836-1886), Keshob Chandra (1838-1884), Bankimchandra(18938-1894) and later Rabindranath Thakur, Henry Vivian Louis Deroziao and his disciples. The initiatives taken by urban educated elites gradually turned into social movements. In the following passages brief accounts of some of these movements is presented.

#### **4.1.1 Brahmmo Samaj Movement**

Brahmmo Samaj movement was initiated by Raja Rammohan Roy. Born of a noble family in 1772 AD, Raja RamMohan Roy is considered as the most prominent personality in Indian social history. He is regarded as the Bharat Pathik (Path finder of India.). Rammohan was a high caste Brahmin by birth but had a liberal outlook. His father's family was more liberal while his mother's inheritance was more rigid in nature with regard to religious activities. The educational grooming of Rammohan was colorful. A versatile genius and multi lingual scholar of his time, Raja Rammohan Roy is considered as the pioneer of Indian Renaissance. During his early life time Farshi was still the official language of the government. Rammohan's initial educational career was started by learning lessons from Farshi language. In course of his studies in Farshi, Rammohan came in touch with Islamic philosophy. To enlighten himself deeply on Islamic Philosophy, Rammohan further learned Arabic language as well. Alongside he also gained

necessary knowledge in Sankrit language to learn Hinduism. In course of his learning Arabic, Rammohan became well versed in holy Quran and its basic philosophy. His knowledge in Quran and Islamic philosophy deeply influenced him and helped in enlightening himself on Islamic theology. The unequivocal monotheism of Islam asserted great influence on the mindset of Rammohan. He was intellectually inspired by the spirit of its prophet Muhammad. “The Muslim influence became such a part of Rammohan that, in his later life, Islamic influence was evident in his manners, dress, and food” (S. C. Crombell; Ram Mohon Roy- His Era and Ethics; 1984; p.-4). Later he started to learn different theologies. He gained vast knowledge on Vedas, Upanishada, Sriti, Tantra, Puranas and modern European philosophy and literature. In course of time, Rammohan Roy became a multi lingual and multi philosophical scholar. His deep knowledge in different philosophies, gradually sown the seeds of syncretism in him and paved the way for becoming the forerunner of so called Indian renaissance. Rammohan put emphasis on modern logical mindset with liberal outlook to interpret religious issues. He attempted to bring necessary changes and reforms in Hindu religious belief deeply clad with religious bigotry. .



In 1814 soon after his arrival in Kolkata, Rammohan established *Atmiyosabha*. The goal of the *Atmiyoshabha* was to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, socially harmful rituals and other social ills. These attempts of Rammohan paved the way for founding Brahmo Samaj on a solid platform. Having been strongly influenced and enlightened by rationalist ideas and logical outlook, Rammohan declared that, “if reason demands; then departure from the Vedant scriptures are justified” (Dr. A. K. Ghose (edited); Ram Mohan Rachanabali; 1997;p.-587.) He strongly stood for creative and intellectual amalgamation of eastern and western intellectual and cultural streams.

Rammohan founded the Brahma Sabha (later Brahma Samaj) in order to materialize his ideas and mission. His ideas and activities generated political consciousness among the Kolkata based newly emerged British backed elite class and in course of time the seed of Indian nationalism was sown among the Hindu educated gentry of Bengal. Dr. Ajit Kumar Ghose remarked, "Practice of theology, preaching of theism and discussion on various social problems made a resonance among the his followers and made Rammohan very popular among his contemporary scholars that helped Rammohan to form Brahma Samaj" (S. Basu; Banglaid Nabo Chetnar Itihas; 2012;p.-43). Sociologically speaking founding of Brahma Samaj by Raja Rammohan Roy could be termed as an initiation of a reform movement in age old traditional Hindu society.

On the other side the British patronized English educated Kolkata based new elite class being influenced by the writings of Mill, Bentham, Comte and by the teaching of Derezio had gradually been inclining towards liberal Christianity. This was a threat for the traditional caste based Hinduism. Rammohan's Brahma Samaj movement with its liberalized theological explanations of Hindu religion based on Vedanta was in actual an attempt to protect Hinduism from the aggression of Christianity. Rammohan was apparently critical about rigid caste system, raised voice against Suttedaha and so on. *Tattwabodhini*, a contemporary Kolkata based News Paper in different articles portrayed the dejected condition of Hindu religion. Swapan Basu remarked, "...in Rathjatra festival devotees indulge in various types of nasty activities like gambling, spending money after prostitutes, betting of their wives in the gambling"(B. B. Ghose; Brahma Samajer Sangkhhipto Itihas;2010; p.7). Rammohan was very critical about the cruel, inhuman religious custom of *Suttee* where the widow of a dead man had to die on fire with her dead husband. He was critical on ugly religious practices performed by the Shakta (the devotee of Shiva) sects of Hinduism in the name of religion. He also was critical about all oppressions on lower caste Hindus by the Brahmins.

This distressing condition of Bengal created favorable ground for the Christian Missionaries to initiate their activities of conversion. Within short span of time Christian Missionaries could get a strong footing in Bengal. They started establishing various Missions in nook and corner of Bengal for achieving their goals. Liberal appeal of the Missionaries attracted the upper caste educated Hindu elites of the society towards Christianity and being influenced, they started to convert themselves to new religion en masse. In this critical juncture, to protect Hindu youths from the aggression of Christianity, Rammohan initiated Brahma Samaj Andolon. Barid Baran

Ghose, in his book states, “To materialize the ideology of syncretism and to project conversion of Hindu into Christianity Brahmmo Samaj was formed in a rented house in 1828. On January 8, 1830 a trust deed was accomplished in favor of Brahmmo samaj where various directions and instructions for the followers of Samaj were documented. They were as follows:

“(i) It denounced polytheism and idol worship;

“(ii) It discarded faith in divine avatars (incarnations);

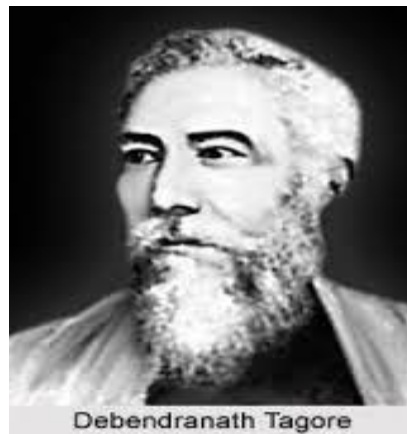
“(iii) It denied that any scripture could enjoy the status of ultimate authority transcending human reason and conscience;

“(iv) It took no definite stand on the doctrine of karma and transmigration of soul and left it to individual Brahmos to believe either way;

“(v) It criticized the caste system.”(ibid; p.8-9).

The deed also clearly stated that “none can enter the prayer hall along with any icon of any deity or picture of any deity, none can offer any prayer of flowers before any idol, and No one can slaughter any animal for sacrifice or for eating. Followers of paganism or theism were also allowed to enter in the prayer hall and offer their prayer, nobody could criticize it or nobody could discuss about other things but the secret of creation and creator which would reflect the humanity and sympathy to humankind”(ibid; p. 20). But irony was, these holy words remained confined within the pages of the trust deed only and had no reflection on life and living of Rammohan or in any activities of Brahmmo Samaj. The fact remains, though Rammohan Roy preached liberal and humanitarian ideology through Brahmmo Samaj movement, but he himself failed to become de classed by freeing him from the influence of caste Hindu values. For example, though in the Brahma Samaj deed it was written that any person of any religion or caste or creed can lead religious prayers, but in practice all the praying sessions were conducted only by the Brahmins. Further, it was prohibited in Barhmo Samaj meeting to recite any verse from Vedas in front of a low caste Hindu. Rammohan did not dare to sidestep the traditional Hindu values and customs controlled by the upper caste Hindus. (Basu;ibid; p.45). It can be concluded that Brahmmo Samaj movement actually was an attempt by the upper caste Hindus to protect the onslaught of Christianity on Hindu religion. Rammohan or his later followers did not had any intention to preach a new religion or they did have any intention to convey any new message for the common people, but their aim was to reform Hindu religious doctrines based on Vedas to contain mass conversion of people to Christianity. Rammohan Roy had a dubious role

in performing his own preached religion. He pretended to be a liberal person, but in belief he was out and out a Hindu. It is stated in an article titled 'The East in Indian' published in 'The Bengal Chronicle' on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1831 that "...what are his (Rammohan Roy's) opinions could neither his friends nor foes can determine. It is easier to say what they are not, than what they are, and this we think is the case with most thinking men."(Basu;ibid; p.47). In spite of his dubious character it can be said that Rammohan attempted to synthesize the core essence of Vedas, the Quran, and the Bible. He used to attend and join in prayers both with Christians and Hindoo Unitarians, but to which he had preference been difficult to determine. He lived a life of caste Hindoo, drinking a little wine occasionally in the cold weather. He sat in a table with Europeans, but never ate anything with them. After the death of Rammohan, Brahmmo Samaj was divided into different groups.



Maharishi Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), joined Brahmmo Samaj in 1842. His joining in the Samaj gave it a new life. Prior to joining in Brahmmo Samaj, Debendranath Tagore headed the Tattvabodhini Sabha (founded in 1839) which was devoted to the systematic study of India's past with a rational outlook and in propagating Roy's ideas, in published form in the Tattvabodhini Patrika in Bengali.

In course of time Brahm Samaj, gradually gained new vitality and strength after joining of some influential social icons in the Samaj such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Ashwini Kumar Datta. Debendranath Tagore worked on two fronts: within Hinduism, the Brahm Samaj was a reformist movement; and in outside, it resolutely opposed the Christian missionaries for their criticism of Hinduism and their attempts to convert locals into Christianity.



Keshub Chandra Sen joined the Samaj in 1858. Keshub popularized the movement, and several branches of the Brahmo Samaj were opened outside Bengal such as in the United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay, Madras and other towns. Kesab Chandra Sen was more radical and progressive in thinking and soon after joining in Brahmo samaj he wanted to materialize his goals through the activities of Samaj. But, regrettably conservative Debendranath opposed some of Sen's ideas, such as cosmopolitanization of the Samaj's meetings by inclusion of teachings from all religions and his strong views against the caste system, even open support to inter caste marriage. At one point Keshub was expelled from his post of Acharjya of the Samaj in 1865 and had to leave the Samaj. Later with the help of his followers Keshub founded the Naba Bidha Brahmo Samaj in 1866. Kesab Chandra Sen was more liberal in attitude and was determine to liberalize the Samaj by abolishing the orthodox notions. At one point some of the followers of Keshub Sen started to consider him as an incarnation of God but this move was rejected by the progressive followers of the Samaj. Further, Keshub was accused of being authoritarian within the Samaj. In 1878, the defiant followers of Keshub set up a new Samaj naming it as 'Sadharan Brahmo Samaj'. In this process Brahmo Samaj became divided into different groups by losing its original characteristics within 50 years of its establishment by Rammohan Roy.

Brahmo Samaj from its genesis aimed at preserving Hindu heritage in India. The founders of the Samaj could realize that without abolishing the roots of the religious dogmas and superstitions from the society, it would not be possible to protect Hinduism from the aggression of Christianity. Thus it attacked the prevailing Hindu bigotry, prejudice, age old meaningless values, traditions and supported emancipation of women from inhuman social bondage,

condemned Suttee, worked for the abolition of purdah system, discouraged child marriages and polygamy, fought for widow remarriage and initiated moves for introduction of scientific educational facilities in Bengal. It also criticized caste system and un-touchability. In final analysis it could be said that Brahma Samaj Movement attained limited success in the sense that, conversion to Christianity by the young educated groups reasonably reduced but in other sector no meaningful achievement of the Samaj could be observed.

#### 4.1.2 Suttee Movement

**Suttee** is an obsolete inhuman funeral custom of the Hindus in India. In Suttee funeral custom a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or in other words commits socially desired suicide shortly after her husband's death. (Sophie Gilmartin p.72 1997),

Mention of Suttee ritual in India dates back to the 1st century BC. But evidence of practicing Suttee by widows of rulers appeared much later, sometimes in between the 5th and 9th centuries AD. The practice was particularly prevalent among some Hindu communities, observed in aristocratic Sikh families, and has been attested to outside South Asia in a number of localities in Southeast Asia, such as in Indonesia and Vietnam (Eraly, Abraham. p.370 2007.)

Initially British did not interfere in the practice of Suttee. Even in certain instances colonial government official attended such ritual as guest. Historian A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed stated "not only seemed to accord an official sanction, but also increased its prestige value"(Ahmed, A.F. Salahuddin 1965. p. 115). Between 1815 and 1818, the number of Suttee in Bengal province doubled from 378 to 839. Under sustained campaigning against Suttee by Christian missionaries such as William Carey and Brahmin Hindu reformers such as Rammohan Roy , Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar , the provincial government banned Suttee in 1829.(S, Arvind , M, Benarasidass. 1988, pp. 6–7) The general ban on Suttee throughout whole of India was promulgated by Queen Victoria in 1861.



**Suttee**

An 18th-century painting depicting Suttee.





Suttee, by James Atkinson 1831



Widow Burning in India (August 1852), by the Wesleyan Missionary Society.

Raja Rammohan Roy pioneered the movement for banning suttee and declared that this inhuman ritual has no religious approval. In support of his claim, Rammohan amassed necessary documents from different religious scriptures. In 1829 Lord Bentinck the then Viceroy of India promulgated Suttee banning law by declaring it as “illegal and punishable offense.” The irony is, though Rammohan led this commendable movement, but he himself in actual was not in favor of sudden banning of the ritual by law. In a minute by Lord William Benedict it was stated that “ it was his(Rammohan) opinion that the practice might be suppressed quietly and un-observably by increasing the difficulties, and by the indirect agency of the police.’ Dr. Ashok Chattyapadhyay states that Lord Bentinck was very much surprised at the reaction of Rammohan after Suttee was banned by enactment of law. However, Rammohan welcomed Lord Bentinck for banning Suttee after 43 days of passing of the law.



*"Ceremony of Burning a Hindu Widow with the Body of her Late Husband", from Pictorial History of China and India, 1851.*



A shrine built in memory of the wives of the Maharajas of Jodhpur who died as Suttee.

The *Prevention of Suttee Act* promulgated by the British authority declared it illegal to support, glorify or attempt to commit Suttee. Supporting to commit Suttee, including coercing or forcing someone to commit Suttee, was considered as punishable offense by death sentence or by life imprisonment, and glorifying Suttee was declared as punishable offence by one to seven years in prison.

### **4.1.3 Widow Remarriage Movement**

The widow remarriage system had been practiced in ancient India without any legal and religious hindrance. Different examples and several references of widow marriage in Ancient Indian could be found in literature . During the Vedic era, widow marriage was allowed for all, irrespective of class and caste. Narada Purana, classified three kinds of remarriage system for the women that was in existence in ancient India. The first one was for a married woman, who fulfilled the

rituals of marriage, but did not live with her husband for a single day, meaning a woman who got married, but did not perform sexual act with her husband was allowed to marry again; the other type was for the woman who after left her husband after consummating marriage could re-marry another person and again could come back to her first husband after desolating the second marriage, and, the third type of remarriage was for a woman, who has been given to any Sapinda after her husband expires. In fact, the Rig Veda prescribes that a widow should give up thinking of her late husband and accepts the re-marriage proposal of the person who wants to marry her. Mention of widow remarriages could be found in Rig-Veda, Taitorio Aranyak, Oitoriy Brahmmo and Otharbo Veda and even in Ramayana, Mahabharata. History tells us that up to 6<sup>th</sup> century widow remarriage was very common among people. It was during 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, widow marriage was discouraged by religious sanctions and gradually was prohibited.

Widow remarriage movement was a very important event in Bengal Social history. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal widow remarriage came up as an acute problem among the higher caste Hindu society. It became more acute after the banning of Suttee. In the third decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century discussion about widow remarriage became wider. In 1835 some aged unmarried women of aristocrat (Koolin) families of Shantipur, wrote in an article published in the Samachar Darpan about their pains, agonies and miseries that they had been facing as widows and recommended for the widow remarriage. Later in 1837 members of upper class Hindu families such as Motilal Sheel, Haldhar Mollik stood for female education and widow marriage. A brilliant student of Kolkata Medical College Raj Krisna Dev in his death bed took steps for remarriage of his immature wife to be widowed after his death. Christian Missionaries in Kolkata as usual came forward to provide necessary support in this movement. The members of Young Bengal under the leadership of Derezio moved in support of widow remarriage. In 1840 Matilal Sheel declared 10000 taka prize money for anyone who would marry a widow. Shyamacharan Das, the supporter of widow remarriage movement applied to Mr. Bhattacharya for getting permission letter for his widow daughter to be remarried. Kashinath Tarkalanker, Bhabosankar Biddyaratna, Ramtanu Tarkasiddhanta, Takurdas Churamoni and Muktararam Biddyabagish signed the petition. For nearly three decades in this way the widow remarriage movement had been going on supported by different Pundits and reformists. Different books were written in favor of widow remarriage. Several associations also gave their supports to widow remarriage but the movement did not get momentum. It was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, whose active participation

rejuvenated the widow remarriage movement. In 1855 Vidyasagar wrote a book in Bengali titled “Bidhaba Bibah Procholit Hoya Uchit Kina (Should widow remarriage be introduced?). In this book he detailed out about the dreadful impact on society for not introducing widow marriage. Vidyasagar in his book stated that immature widows in many instances could indulge themselves in various vicious and anti-social activities. As a consequence, illegal sexual activities, prostitution and illegal abortion rapidly increased in society. These anti-social activities could be reduced from the society if widow remarriage could be introduced. He also cited various instances from the Holy Scriptures of the Hindus in favor of widow remarriage and asked the social leaders to give support in his endeavor for the welfare of the society. After the publication of this book Vidyasagar was hailed by all and widow remarriage movement got a new thrust. Vidyasagar in the same year published the English version of the book titled “Remarriage of Hindu Widows”. Prior to joining of Vidyasagar the widow remarriage movement was confined within the restrooms of some liberal educated persons. It was Vidyasagar under whose leadership; the movement got a new impetus in wider scale. Vidyasagar wrote a petition to the British Government signed by 987 persons from all stratum of life for enactment of law in support of widow remarriage. This prompted the British Government to enact a law in support of widow remarriage in India. On November 17 in 1855 J. P. Grant prepared a draft on the issue for enactment of law and Sir James Kalvil and P. W supported it. At last in 1856 widow remarriage law was passed with the following clauses:

“1. No marriage contracted between Hindus shall be invalid, and the issue of no such marriage shall be illegitimate, by reason of the woman having been previously married or betrothed to another person who was dead at the time of such marriage, any custom and any interpretation of Hindu Law to the contrary notwithstanding.

“2. All rights and interests which any widow may have in her deceased husband's property by way of maintenance, or by inheritance to her husband or to his lineal successors, or by virtue of any will or testamentary disposition conferring upon her, without express permission to remarry, only a limited interest in such property, with no power of alienating the same, shall upon her remarriage cease and determine as if she had then died; and the next heirs of her deceased husband or other persons entitled to the property on her death, shall thereupon succeed to the same ....

“3. Except as in the three preceding sections is provided, a widow shall not by reason of her remarriage forfeit any property or any right to which she would otherwise be entitled, and every

widow who has re-married shall have the same rights of inheritance as she would have had, had such marriage been her first marriage.”(Hossain. A. I; 2017;p.43).

Wide protests were lodged against the legislature of the law by the conservative reactionary groups of the Hindu society. Conservative Hindu groups imposed different social injunctions on those who were in support of the enactment. These groups tried to restrain people from widow remarriage and threatened the supporters of the law to socially boycott them. As a consequence, some people withdrew their supports to widow remarriage and discontinued their involvement with the movement. Vidyasagar did not stop at this and continued to do whatever was possible for making his efforts a success. After four months of passing widow marriage law on 7 November in 1856 a widow remarriage was arranged in Viddya Sagar’s friend Raj Krisna’s residence. Bride was Kalimoti and groom was Srees Chandra Bidyaratno. Viddya Sagar spent lot of money for arranging widow remarriages. He almost spent 82 thousand taka for this purpose and arranged remarriage of 62 widows. Moreover, Vidyasagar himself arranged the marriage of his son with a widow. (ibid; p.45).

#### **4.1.4 Young Bengal Movement**

19<sup>th</sup> century Kolkat witnessed the emergence of a movement known as ‘Yong Bengal’ in the history. The Young Bengal movement was initiated by a group of radical free thinking students of Kolkata Hindu College called Derozians named after their teacher Henry Louis, Vivian Derozio. Derozio was a poet and teacher at Hindu College. He was a radical thinker and one of the first scholars of India to disseminate western learning and science among young students of him at Hindu College in Kolkata. In 1832 at the age of 17, Derozio was appointed a teacher of English literature and History at Hindu college. By his brilliant teaching and eloquent speech Derozio could influence his disciples and that won him the loyalty of his students. Derozio’s intense zeal for teaching, his deep friendly interaction with students, created an intellectually developed group of students at Hindu college. He taught his students to think freely and not to accept anything blindly. His teaching inspired his students about the spirit of liberty, equality and freedom. Derozio’s activities could well be termed as an intellectual revolution that ushered in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. But for his radical thinking Derozio was charged for corrupting his students by teaching them anti social anti religious ideas and was forced to resign from his post as a teacher of Hindu college. Soon after his resignation Derozio unfortunately died of Cholera only

at the age of 22 in Kolkata in 1831([https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/02/the young bengal movement/](https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/02/the-young-bengal-movement/)).

The intellectual influence of Derozio did not withered and his sway remained among his students even long after his death. These students of Derozio later came to be known as ‘Yong Bengal’ in Indian history. Many of the members of the group became prominent figures in social reform movements in Bengal. Men like Kashiprasad Ghose and Ramprosad Railke. K. N. Benerjee , Debendranath Tagore and Prosanna Kumar Tagore, were among the early students of the Hindu College and disciples of Derozio. The writings of Akshay Kumar Dutta reflected the progress infused into Hindu society through the Hindu College. The reforms initiated by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar could get impetus only after these Young Bengal followers were ornamented with advanced ideas due to English Education and inspired and excited by the spirit of free thought taught by Derozio. “They ridiculed Hindu traditions, defied the social and religious rites, demanded education for women, and to flaunt their independence the followers of this new radical group were indulged in wine drinking and eating beef.” (Wikipedia 2017)

The Followers of Young Bengal were critical about social practices and religious dogmas, beliefs of orthodox Hinduism in the spirit of English rationalism and French revolution. Historian Ramesh Datta says, “The Hindu College, which was established in 1817 inflicted a revolution in the ideas of young Hindus of the day. They imbibed in that College a warm appreciation of western literature and western civilization, and brooked with impatience the unreasoning restrictions which modern Hindu customs has imposed on them”(ibid.p.43).

The grand contribution of Young Bengal Movement was the formation of a debating society “Academic Association” and publishing magazines and journals through which they preached their enlightened and revolutionary ideas against religious bigotry and social prejudices. “Academic Association’ was the first student forum in India. The members of Young Bengal enriched themselves by studying Shakespeare, Milton, Spencer, Bacon, Locke, Barkly, Hume and Douglas Stewart.(ibid).

They followers of Young Bengal Movement were fearless fighter against all sorts of social and religious orthodoxy that belittled humanity and impeded the progress. They unhesitantly uttered with boldness that

- a) We hate Hinduism from the bottom of our heart.
- b) I do not believe in the sanctity of Gangeese.

- c) We recite verses of the Iliad in the temple instead of Mantras.
- d) We hymn the beauty of Helen before the deity of temple instead Mantras
- e) We welcome Kali uttering ‘Good morning madam’ instead of bowing head before the idol.(Hossain. A. I. 2016; p.54).

Academic association of the Young Bengal group, could be termed as the torch bearer of modern thinking in the dark patches of Indian social history. It was meaningfully a liberal and secular institution where all curious students could take parts to pursuing their philosophical thirst. ‘Academic Association’ as described in India Gazette was “The spirit of union spread by itself”. Within short span of time a great numbers of literary societies grew in Calcutta mainly under the leadership of the students of Hindu college.

Reason was their God. The main motto of Young Bengal Movement was to unearth the root of all evils in the name of religion from the society. Therefore, their first onslaught was on prejudiced Hindu religion and its various dogmatic rituals and practices. Young Bengal Movement raised sense of liberation, sense of self-esteem and sense of reason among people which grew in them the sense of patriotism, humanity and liberal outlook. In economy the Young Bengal followed classical economics and was composed of free trade, who took inspiration from Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith and David Ricardo (<https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/02/the-young-Bengal-movement/>).

Derozian ideas of Young Bengal, had a profound influence on the social movements that came to be known as ‘Bengal Renaissance’ in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite being viewed as something of an iconoclasts by men like Alexander Duff and other Christian Missionaries, “Derozio’s ideas on the acceptance of the rational spirit were accepted partly as long as they were not in conflict with basic tenets of Christianity and as long as they criticized orthodox Hinduism” (<https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/02/the-young-Bengal-movement/>).

Young Bengal carried out the legacy of Raja Rammohan’s tradition of educating people in economic and political questions. Through newspapers, pamphlets and public conversation “they carried out public agitations on public questions such as the revision of Company’s charter, the freedom of press, better treatment of Indian laborer in British colonies abroad, trial by jury, protection of the ryots from repressions of the zamindars, and employment of Indians in higher grades of Government jobs.”(<https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/02/the-young-Bengal-movement/>).

It was Young Bengal movement which was responsible for bringing radical change in Hindu dogmatic thinking, It showed the path of scientific education, modern philosophy, new way of life and positive thinking.. The formation of new social fabric with advanced knowledge and free thinking in 19<sup>th</sup> century urban life was the outcome of the Young Bengal movement. Derozio in one of his letter to Wilson wrote that, “Come then my friend of the Hindoos, and jointly, hail the approach of what is conducive to the interest of a nation and the civilization of man. Welcome Truth, knowledge, Virtue and therefore happiness

“It is being wrong to speak at all upon such a subject, I am guilty; but I am neither afraid, nor ashamed to confess having stated the doubts of Philosophers upon this head, because I have also stated the solution of these doubts. Is it forbidden anywhere to argue upon such a question? If so, it must be equally wrong to adduce an argument upon either side, or is it consistent with an enlightened notion of truth to wed ourselves to only one view of so important a subject, resolving to close our eyes and ears against all impressions oppose themselves to it”(Wadud’ K. A.2016.p.55).

Though Rammohan was the initiator of banning Suttee in India, but at the same time it has to be acknowledged that along with other contemporary organizations and individuals who came forward to extend their hand in support of that movement Derozio was one of them. He wrote his famous poetry ‘The Fakir of Jhangeera’ where he portrayed the gloomy picture of Suttee custom.

Even after the passing law in favour of banning Suttee, Derozio wrote a poem named ‘On the Abolition of Sutee’ welcoming Lord Bentinck and Raja Rammohan Roy for the passing the law for termination of the Suttee from the society. He wrote,

Red from his chambers came the morning sun  
And frowned, dark Ganges, on thy fatal shore.  
Journeying on high; but when the day was done  
He set in smiles, to rise in blood no more.  
Hark! heard ye not? The widow’s will is over  
No more the flames from impious pyres ascend.  
See mercy, now primeval peace restore,  
While pagans glad the arch ethereal rend,  
For India hails at last, her father and her friend.  
Back to its cavern, ebbs the tide of crime,



There fettered, locked, and powerless it seelps;  
 And History bending o'er the page of time.  
 Were many a mournful record still she keeps.  
 The widowed Hindoo's fate no longer weeps.  
 The priestly tyrant's cruel charm is broken.  
 O'er all the land 'tis spread he trembled at the token.  
 Bentick, be thine the everlasting mead;  
 The heart's full homage still is virtue's claim.  
 And 'tis the good man's ever honoured deed  
 which gives an immortality of fame:  
 Transcient and fierce, though dazzling is the flame  
 The glory lights upon the wastes of War  
 Nations unborn shall venerate they name.  
 A triumph that the conqueror's mightier far  
 The memory shall be blessed as the morning star.  
 The storm is passing, and the rainbow's span  
 Stretch from north to south; the ebon car  
 Of darkness rolls away: the breezes fan  
 The infant dawn, and morning's hearld star  
 Comes trembling into day! can the Sun be far's? India.(ibid. p.51).

In the ultimate analysis the Young Bengal movement cannot be termed as successful in achieving its goal. It failed to get proper supports from other Bengali literati, or academics. Even Rammohan was critical about them. Their shaky ideology, concentration in urban center of Kolkata for all these, the movement never was able to fully capture the wider public attention. The Young Bengal movement was confined among members of association and academy run by the elite upper caste Hindu youths. It could not penetrate into the mind set of major section of the population. Moreover, young Bengal failed to succeed in creating a movement mainly because the social condition was not ripe for their ideology to flourish.

No doubt, Young Bengal was a gathering of bright young men who had come under the spell of striking personality like Derozio, and they created a sensation and stir. But their stand lacked positive content and they failed to develop a definite progressive ideology. The concept of the

people and their rights which had flowered in the western bourgeoisie democratic revolution, that had awakened them, did not make much concrete shape in the mind of young Bengal.

The young Bengal movement was like a mighty storm that tried to sweep away everything before it. “It was a storm that lashed society with violence causing some good and perhaps naturally some discomfort and distress”(ibid).

The Kolkata based social movements sometimes referred to as Bengal renaissance could not come up with any non-sectarian, liberal universal humanitarian ethical views. The Bengali Muslim community, the rural poor and schedule caste Hindus of colonial Bengal, who were deprived of modern western education had no linkage with the so called Bengali renaissance. On the one side, illiteracy, conservative thinking, and false idea of nationalism among the Muslims of the then Bengal as well as, on the other side the idea of cultural differences of the caste Hindus and their disrespect, apathetic attitudes towards Bengali Muslim community barred the Muslims to become emotionally involved in the Bengali renaissance movement. This is why, this so called renaissance of Bengal in no way can be termed as the outcome of joint efforts of Hindu and Muslim communities neither had it helped to unify Hindus and Muslims. Rather as a consequence, contradictions, differences and hatred between Hindus and Muslims of Bengal became evident. The so called renaissance influenced the development of modern Bengali literature to some extent negatively and as a consequence, still contains reminiscences of such racial animosity. However; no doubt that 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal in reality was humming with different activities in the field of education, culture and religion, But it needs to be remembered that patronized by the British colonial rulers this awakening was basically Kolkata based and impacted only on the life and living of the upper class Hindu population living within the edge of Kolkata city. The benefits of these movements throughout Bengal by crossing the boundary of Kolkata city never became a reality.

## 4.2 Rural Movements

Along with the endeavor of the Kolkata based urban English educated Hindu middle class for so called mass awakening, condition of mass upsurges in the rural Bengal was ripening fast among the socially deprived rural mass in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. In the following passages I tend to focus briefly some salient features of these movements.

Earlier we have mentioned that the introduction of Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 by the British rulers created a new landed aristocracy with ownership rights in land formerly unknown in Bengal. History tells us, the introduction of Permanent Settlement and the creation of new zamindars, had tremendous negative impact on the mass population of Bengal. It caused a severe famine that grasped the whole of Bengal which in history is known as ‘Chiattarer Mannantar’. Almost two third population of Bengal was wiped out due to this famine. Moreover; colonial misrule, extreme extortion of money from the *Ryots* by the agents of British authority the zamindars, want of foods and so on all these events resulted in numbers of armed mass upsurges against the British rule in the country. Among these Farazi movement, Revolt by Titu Mir, Indigo Revolt and Farmers Revolt are famous anti Colonial movements that shook t whole of Bengal in 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### 4.2.1 Farayezi Movement

When Kolkata was humming with different so called reforms movements, at the same time rural Bengal had been witnessing steaming of mass upsurges against oppressive laws and measures of the government and their agents newly appointed zamindars. Most of these movements were initiated as religious reform movements and eventually turned into direct arm revolts against local zaminders and British collaborators. Farayezi movement was one of those movements and under its banner rural peasantry in Bengal became united against British misrule and revolted. Initiated by Muslim religious leader Haji Shariyatullah (1781-1840) in 1818, Frayezi movement became very popular among the Muslim peasantry in various districts of Bengal during the British Rule.

Shariatullah went to Mecca at The age of 18 and there he came into contact with the Wahabis. Returning to his country he could convince large numbers of rural Muslims peasantry about his new realizations on the principles of Islam. Within ten years, the Farayezi Movement had spread

with extra-ordinary rapidity in the districts of Faridpur, Bakharganj and Mymensingh and later to whole of Bangladesh..

The word 'Farayezi' derives from Arabic word *Faraz* which means 'must to do' indicating obligatory duty of the Muslims to perform all rules of Islam. The Oriental Baptist on its issue of September 1855 stated, "The term Farayezi denotes one who obeys the commands of God that was given to his followers to distinguish them from common people, who practice many ceremonies that have no place among the precepts of the Quran."(Hossain. A. I. ibid. p.77). Though started as a religious movement, it soon became political in nature. Shariat Ullah termed British-ruled India as "Dar-ul-Harb" or a land of the unbeliever and felt that it was not suitable for the habitation of pious Muslims and needs to be turned into 'Darul Islam' or land of Peace. He declared "Allah did not discriminate among people by their economic or social status. To Him all are equal." He created public opinion against exploiting zamindars and indigo planters and very soon millions of poor Muslim farmers, artisans and jobless weavers became his disciples in Barisal, Mymensingh, Dhaka and Faridpur. It was a mass awakening for Bengali Muslims and they were bold enough to protest against the British misrule carried out by their agents the zamindars. Interestingly, Farayezi movement though initiated as an Islamic religious reform movement, many of the Hindu exploited peasants in rural Bengal also at one stage of the movement rendered their supports to it. The initial target of this movement was to bring necessary religious reform among prejudiced Muslims who were mostly converted Muslim and who did not give up their old religious rituals and way of life.

The root of the Farayezi movement was engrafted in Wahabi movement which was initiated by Imam Abdul Wahab an Arabic Islami scholar. Abdul Wahab, started his movement basically to reform some malpractice in the name Islam. Towards the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century, Abdul Wahab resolved to adopt such means as should effectually put a stop to the loose practice of the Turks. He soon secured the co-operation of an Arab chief, who devoted himself to restoration of the pure faith and establishment of an empire on Islamic theocratic principles. The reformed religious practices based on the principles of Islam, inculcated belief in the prophetic character of Muhammad and the inspiration of the Quran, and enjoined five daily prayers, giving Zakat to the poor amounting to one fifth of one's annual income, fasts during the month of Ramzan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca. It discarded all other traditions as an impure source of doctrine, taught that Muhammad was a mere mortal like any other man, he intended his creed for the whole world and

not only for Arabia exclusively. These reformers propagated their agenda by sword and decreed that all who reject their teachings should be exterminated. After a series of conquests in Arabia they took the city of Mecca in 1803, and their leader Abdul Aziz forbade the reading of the Khutbah in the name of the Sultan. (ibid. p.57).

Sariatullah's attempts to establish Quranic Islam went against some practices which were similar to that of paganism. History tells that, after the permanent settlement in 1793 Land ownership was vested to Hindus and a new aristocracy based on land, a new Zaminder class was created. The real owner of the land the cultivators, the *peasants* or *Ryots* were uprooted from their land and gradually became destitute. Most of these Zaminders were Hindus and the ryots-the peasants were Muslims. As a consequence, they did not spare any opportunity to suppress the Muslim *Ryots*. They imposed various taxes on *Ryots* like *Sraddha Kharcha*, *Poita Kharcha*, *Raath Kharcha* and *Durga Breetthi* and so on, Haji Sariatullah found that all these taxes are charged to celebrate pagan festivals and were against theism and against the interest of poor peasants. So Haji proclaimed prohibition against those taxes and asked all Muslim *Ryots* not to pay any such taxes that was contradictory to Islam. As a consequence Haji and his followers became enemies of the Zaminders. Zaminders attempted to bring Haji and his followers to book. On the other hand, some conservative groups in Muslim society stood against Haji's reform movement. As a result, Haji and his followers had to face some encounters from Zaminders and a group of conservative Muslims. But Haji's movement day by day became more popular among the common Muslim people of rural Bengal as well as among Hindu peasants too because of its pro peasant character. At this stage, Haji started providing training to his followers for making them skilled in fighting with sticks. Zamindars lodged complain against Haji and cases were filed against him and his followers. Haji and his followers faced trials, but all cases were dismissed due to lack of evidence. After the death of Haji in 1840 his son Mohsin Uddin Ahmed alias Duddu Mian became successor and took the charge of the movement. Under the successful leadership of Duddu Mian, Faraiji movement reached its zenith. Duddu Mia was able to draw attention of more people and gradually the movement spread throughout Bengal.

Duddu Mian was more revolutionary and aggressive in his policy. He successfully organized a daring gang of fighters with sticks. He lodged two armed attacks against Sikder Zaminder of Kanaipur in 1841 and against the Ghose Zaminder of Faridpur in 1841. Duddu Mian emerged as the rescuer of the persecuted *Ryots* and peasants who were the prey of oppression of local

Zaminder. Duddu Mian became a threat for all Zaminders. As a consequence, Zamindars became united against Duddu Mia and in connivance with Local administration and judiciary conspired against him and his followers. Duddu Mia and his followers were branded as miscreants and various administrative and judicial steps were taken against them. The Zamindars became successful in convincing the government that Duddu Mian's movement was an attempt to uproot the government and to establish independent Islamic state. Consequently Duddu Mian was arrested by the government and sentenced and sent to Alipur jail. But the conspirators failed to prove him guilty and he was freed in 1859. But he was arrested again from Faridpur and sentenced to jail again and was freed from Faridpur jail in 1860. In 1861 he fell in sick and died in 1862. After the death of Duddu Mian Faraiji Movement his son Noa Mia took over the leadership but his focus shifted from anti British activities to religious reform and eventually Faraizi Movement weakened and became a religious sect only. The Faraizi Movement was "essentially an agrarian movement, though the demands were carefully dressed up in religious catchwords. Duddu Mian had invoked a new awareness among peasants by uniting them against zamindars and indigo planters. Though the movement failed mainly for lack of political education among its leaders but it protected the rights of tenants to a great extent.

#### **4.2.2 Revolt by Titu Mir**

Syed Mir Nisar Ali alais Titu Mir (1782 – 1831) was the first Bengali rebel to fight against the Zamindars and the British colonial authorities in Bengal during the 19th century. He was born on 27 January 1782 AD in Chandpur village, of North 24 Parganas district (currently in West Bengal, India). His father was Syed Mir Hassan Ali and mother was Abida Ruqayya Khatun. Titu Mir's education began in his village school. When he was 18 years of age, he became a Hafiz of the Qur'an and a scholar of the Hadith and Muslim traditions. He acquired pedantry on the Bengali, Arabic, and Persian languages. During this time he came under the influence of several Wahabi scholars, who preached a mixture of militant Islam and anti-colonial thought and looking for both religious and political reform in Bengal. He became a disciple of Syed Ahmad Barelvi whose teachings of struggle against British oppression influenced his thoughts. "Titu Mir adopted Wahhabism, and advocated Sharia laws, by passing the "tradition of folkish Islam in Bengal"(Dasgupta. A1993)

In 1822, Titu Mir went on a pilgrimage to Mecca to perform the Hajj and on his return he organized peasants mostly Muslims of his native village against the landlords or Zamindars and the British colonialists. Titu Mir from the very beginning spent his energies in organizing the peasants against the oppressive zamindars, money-lenders and indigo farmers. Titu Mir amassed a large number of followers who were mostly Muslim peasants and weavers. Around Narkelbaria his main task was more than that of a religious reformer. He started raising voice against the oppressive role of the zamindars and Indigo planters. Dr. Asit Dasgupta locates Mir's revolt in the larger context of uprisings of peasants in Bengal, who were the first to suffer the impact of colonial systems of taxation and agricultural extraction. Dr Dasgupta writes "Mir refused to pay the enhanced tax imposed on poor peasants in North 24 Paraganas district and then organised and led protests, which irked the land holders, both Hindu and Muslim"( Dasgupta A. p 223: 1993). Eventually the zamindars and British administrators jointly mobilized forces against Titu. Mir. Titu proclaimed the illegitimacy of the Company's government and declared that the Muslims were the rightful owners of the empire. The rebels had declared that henceforth they were to receive rent from the peasants and they proceeded from village to village enforcing their demand.

#### **4.2.2.1 Confrontations with the Zamindars**

Titu Mir opposed various discriminatory measures against the peasants especially against Muslim *Ryots*. Titu opposed to pay taxes on mosques and for having beard imposed by the local Hindu zamindar Krishnadev Roy. The rift between Titu Mir and his followers and the local Zamindars, supported by the British authority, continued to widen and finally took the shape of armed conflict at several places. Titu trained his followers in hand-to-hand combat and the use of the *lathi* (Bamboo stick) inside the Mosques and Madrassahs. The increasing strength of Titu Mir alarmed the Zamindars who involved the British in their fight against him. Being instigated by the Zamindar of Gobardanga, Davis, the English kuthial (factor) of Mollahati, at one stage advanced with force against Titu Mir, but was defeated. Titu Mir filed a complaint to the East India Company against the oppression of the local Zamindar, but it left no result. He refused to pay taxes on beard and mosque to the Zaminder Krishna Dev Roy.

#### 4.2.2.2 Confrontations with the British

Titu Mir, raised 15,000 Mujahidin by that time, and they were ready to face any armed conflict, and built a fort of bamboo at Narikelbaria, near the town of Barasat. The Bamboo fort was surrounded by a high double curtain wall of bamboo stakes filled in with mud cladding and sun-baked brick. Titu Mir declared independence from the British, and regions comprising the current districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia and Faridpur came under his control. The private armies of the Zamindars and the forces of the British met with a series of defeats at the hands of Titu's men who took the guerrilla tactics of strike-and-retreat against enemies.

Finally, the British forces, led by Lieutenant Colonel Stewart consisting of 100 cavalry, 300 native infantry and artillery with two cannons, mounted concerted attacks on 14 November 1831, *against* Titu Mir and his followers. Armed with nothing more than the bamboo quarter staff and Lathi and a few swords and spears, Titu Mir and his forces could not withstand the might of modern weapons, and were defeated. The bamboo castle was destroyed, and Titu Mir was killed along with several of his followers. The commanding officer of the British forces noted his opponent's bravery in dispatches, and also commented on the strength and resilience of bamboo as a material for fortification, since he had had to pound it with artillery for a surprisingly long time before it gave way. After a long-drawn trial, Golam Rasul, Titumeer's nephew and second in command was hanged and some 350 others were sentenced to transportation for life.

“In the stormy annals of anti-colonial peasant struggles in our country, Titu Meer and [his] Wahabi followers appeared as petrels with a message for a future peasant society, shorn of repression and exploitation.”(Dasgupta, Asit p.290 :1993)

#### 4.2.3 Indigo Movement

Indigo movement is a very significant event in the social history of Bangladesh even in Indian history. History of indigo plantation in ancient Bengal could be traced in history but it still obscure how did indigo plantation started in Bengal (Mossain M. Yousuf,1999. p.17). It was Louis Bonard, a French trader introduced modern indigo planting in Bengal in 1777. He brought indigo seeds and modern planting technology in Bengal from America. In the next year another British trader Carole Bloom who established Neelkuthi and asked East India Company to flourish indigo trade in larger scale for incurring more profit. And history tells us that within few years East India Company captured the whole indigo business. In the British kingdom with the expansion of British power in Bengal, indigo planting became more and more commercially



profitable due to the demand for blue dye in Europe. With the motto of incurring more profit from indigo planting, it was extended to large parts of Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, etc. The indigo planters did not hesitate to go to any extent for making money out of it. They mercilessly compelled the peasants to plant indigo instead of food crops. They used to provide loans to the indigo peasant, called Dadon, at a very high interest. Peasants had to accomplish a deed in blank paper made by the indigo planter and later the planters used to put strict conditions that favors the planters not the peasants. An English writer stated, "The cold, hard and sordid who can plough up grain fields, kidnap reculant rayets, confine them in dark holes, beat and starve them into submission, which things have sometimes be done, can give no moral guarantee of his capability of filing up a blank paper and turning it to his pecuniary profit." (Hossain. M. Y. 1990;p.37). If once a farmer fall in the trap of such loans he remained in debt for whole of his life and it passes to successors after his death. The farmers could make no profit in growing indigo. An account is carried out in a book titled Neel Bidroher Nanakotha by Muhammad Yousuf Hossain, where it is stated that in Chuadanga Jhenidah region of now a day Bangladesh, a farmer took 2 taka as Dadon (loan) from planters from which 2 paisa was the cost of stamp for accomplishing contract deed. He paid 10 annas as land tax to zaminder 1 taka for purchasing seeds of indigo, irrigation and other cost was 12 annas. Altogether total production cost of the peasant came to Taka 2 and 14 annas. It means farmer had to spend almost 3 taka for planting indigo in 1 bigha land but in lieu he got only 2 taka as Dadon (loan) from planters. It shows that a farmer had a net 1 taka loss for growing indigo in his land plus his labor. But on the other side indigo planters incurred 12 taka 6 annas of cash profit from the selling indigo produced in 1 bigha land. The farmers were totally unprotected from the brutal indigo planters, who resorted to mortgages or destruction of their property and in many cases they were physically tortured by the indigo planters if they were unwilling to obey them. Government rules favored the planters. By an act enacted in 1833, the law guaranteed the planters a free hand of oppression on the peasants. Even the zamindars, money lenders and other influential persons sided with the planters. The severe oppression unleashed on the peasants led the farmers to revolt against the Indigo planters.

The revolt started from Nadia where Bishnucharan Biswas and Digambar Biswas first led the rebellion against the planters. It spread rapidly in Murshidabad, Birbhum, Burdwan, Pabna, Khulna, Narail, etc. Some indigo planters were given a public trial and executed. The indigo

depots were burned down. Many planters fled to avoid being caught. The zamindars were also became targets of the rebellious peasants.

The revolt was ruthlessly suppressed by the British government. Large forces of police and military, backed by the British Government and the zamindars, mercilessly slaughtered a number of peasants. In spite of this, the revolt was fairly popular, involving almost the whole of Bengal. The Biswas brothers of Nadia, Kader Molla of Pabna, Rafique Mondal of Malda were popular leaders. Even some of the zamindars supported the revolt, the most important of whom was Ramratan Mullick of Narail.

In 1833 the British Govt, proclaimed 'Purchasing of Plantation Land' Act, This act helped the indigo Businessmen a lot, The British Company brought slaves from the West Indian Islands to Bengal. Then British and Bengali Businessmen purchased Taluks and Zamiderry for indigo cultivation and become Zaminder in Bengal, for example: the Bengal Indigo Company bought 594 villages in Jessore and Nadia and became Zaminder,

The Bengali middle class supported the peasants whole-heartedly. Harish Chandra Mukherjee described the plight of the poor peasants in his newspaper *The Hindu Patriot*. However the articles were overshadowed by Dinabandhu Mitra, who gave an accurate account of the situation in his play "Neel Darpan". The play created a huge reaction and criticism against the Indigo Plantation and British policy.

#### **4.2.4 Peasant Movement**

Peasant Movement of Pabna-Sirajgonj is a very significant historical event in the social history of Bengal. Peasant movement of Pabna-Sirajgonj was mass movement in character. The main motto of that movement was to save the rural peasant from the persecution of the Zaminders. Like other rural movements, peasant movement was also the consequence of repeated persecution and oppression on peasants and *Ryots* by local Zaminders. Peasant movement was not a sudden incident but was an outburst of long accumulated anger of the peasants due to oppressions on them by the Zaminders. It was non-sectarian spontaneous revolt of the peasants against zamindery oppression. The Yusuf Shahi Pargana located in the vast tract of Rajshahi, Pabna, Sirajganj was consisted of 272 estates and 695 villages. It was under the authority of Rani Bhabani of Natore. In between 1796 and 1815 this Pargana was bought by Tagore Family of Kolkata, Banerjee family of Dhaka, Shanyal family of Salap, Pakrashi family of Stholo

Basantopur and Bhaduri family of Porjana. Shahjadpur was under Tagore Zamindery. Zaminders after taking charge increased taxes and in some instances it was doubled. Besides collection of regular taxes, the zamindars frequently imposed various types of casual taxes like road building tax, tax for meeting up their family expenses, Parboni, Selami, Najrana, tax for school expenses, tax for village expenses and tax for feast and so on. These Zaminders had no link with their peasants excepting maintaining the relation of tax collector and tax payer.(Hossain. A. I. *ibid.* p.86). When needed Zamindars even used to enhance tax without any prior notice as per their wish. This acted as the direct and cause of peasant revolt in Bengal. Hindu Patriot the then leading newspaper carried an article where it said “We believe all candid men have by this time been convinced that the proximate cause of the Pabna riots was an indiscriminate enhancement of rents.(*ibid.*) The tyranny of Zaminders crossed all the limits of tolerance. They for their interest did not hesitate to snatch the belongings of peasants and even to kill them. In 1873 Salnyan or Sannyal Zaminder killed a Rayot and Bhaduri Zaminder deployed hooligans to loot the villages in the plea of collecting rent. Those hooligans looted villages and killed a village man. The rapacious Zaminder abducted a man and detained him in jail who gave witness against the killing by Zaminder. Mr. Nolan says, “It is clear that the zaminders of Eshrafshahi are a turbulent set of men without any respect for law and very little for life in their dealings with the ryots and with one another”.(*ibid.*) For incurring more rent from land zaminders reduced the size of chain to and local pole to measure land. Beforehand 23.75 inches long chain (pole) was used to measure land, it was reduced to 18 inches by Eshrafshahi zaminders for incurring much rent from land. “until it became customary to substitute the Government chain for the local pole and it was maintained by all the zaminders excepting the Tagore. .. on the Tagore estates the length of the cubit was 19.50 inches only.(*ibid.*) In this way zaminders incurred extra rents from the ryots. As a consequence, the ryots became united and revolted against the tyrant zaminders which eventually came to be known as the peasant movement. Mr. Nolan said, “The real origin of the dispute is to be found in the frequent enhancement of rents and the illegal extortion in Esafshahi Pergunnah.”(*ibid.*p. 87). As a result the ryots of Usufshahi Pargunah were on the point of revolt. Tagore zaminders were more tyrannical in increasing rent. They increased their rent from 1 taka per bigha to 1.75 taka. But in neighboring Sanyal zamindary the rent was 1 taka 2 paisa per bigha for the same quality soil. P. Nolan wrote, “There being no reason for the difference as the soil is just the same and the villages adjoin, except that the Tagore have been

more active than the Sanyals in enhancement. (Chattapadhaya. Dr. A. 1995. p. 76). Rayots from all zamindaries could realized that if they did not get united than the tyranny of zaminder and the tendency of frequent enhancement of rent and taxes could not be stopped. Therefore, they started to protest zamindars oppression in united way and in some cases they became successful. Their success encouraged them for launching a big revolt against zamindary oppression and aggression. The movement was secular in nature. All the persecuted *Ryots* from Hindu and Muslim society joined hand together and became united with a common motto - to resist the zaminders and to lodge protest against their aggressive and oppressive behavior. The revolt of the peasants spread very quickly in larger areas of Pabna and Sirajgonj. *Desh Hitoishini Patrika* carried out details about the movement and stated “We came to know that the ryots of well known Zemindars of Ushapshahi, Shalap and Pakarshi Pergunnaah, being dissatisfied have been depositing their rents in the Collectorate. This situation clearly indicates existence of an unfriendly atmosphere between the zemindar and their *Ryots*. The cause of this unfriendly relation between the zamindars and their *Ryots* lies in the fact that *Ryots* disagree to pay excessive high rent as demanded by the zemindars. This unfriendly situation reached so high that neither the zemindars nor any of his men are now able to set foot in the villages under their own zemindaris.”(Ref Dao) Under the leadership of Ishan Chandra Roy, Khudi Mollah, Ganga Charan Paul, Shambhunath Paul, Ramjan Sarker, Zaker Joarder, Rahim Pramanik, Arbin Mridha, Hazari Pramanik, Mandir Sarker, Jagat Bhoumic, Raju Sarker and Chhalu Sarker the peasant movement reached its zenith. Tyrant zaminders to subside the movement filed different false cases against the leaders of the movement and against some *Ryots*. On the other hand elite class and Kolkata based newspapers did not support the peasant movements and took a stand in favor of the Zaminders. Moreover, neither they played any role for an amicable settlement of the problem. The relation between zaminders and *Ryots* gradually worsen and from government side an arbitrator came to arbitrate for a peaceful settlement. They proposed to the zaminders, “Tagore would withdraw their recent demands for four annas increase, and if Bandyopadhyas and Pakrasees would give up old illegal cess to the same amount, and similar concessions were made elsewhere.”(ibid. p.95). The peasant movement was targeted against the zaminders, and as such urban elite class was totally silent about it and in some instances urban elites supported the tyrant zaminders. Government finally passed the Projasatta Ain (Law on Peasants Rights) in favor of the peasants and the peasant revolt came into a peaceful settlement.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In the above passages I attempted to provide a pen picture of Kolkata based social movements led by British colonial backed English educated elite class, for protecting the interests of the upper class Hindu and for this reason, it impacted on a very limited scale. It did not leave any positive result for the common people of Bengal excepting some elite population of Kolkata city. Kolkata based movements were basically reformative movement. No movements in Kolkata were vocal about the welfare of common people or no movement of Kolkata talked against zamindary oppression and British suppression. But movements that steamed in rural areas, though started as revivalism but eventually these movements turned into mass revolution. And similarly the rural based movements also were sectarian in nature. These rural upsurges were turned into class struggle at one stage but those movements in the long run failed to come up with any concrete positive effects for the people due to later leadership. In the next Chapter I attempted to analyze the 19<sup>th</sup> century rural movements in Bengal that occurred in the mental spheres of the rural destitute mass population in Bengal.

## CHAPTER 5

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal and Emergence of Cult Movements

#### 5.0 Introduction

19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal emerged as the epicenter of socio-cultural and religious reform movements in the history of modern India. Conquest of India by the British Imperial Power and subsequent changes due to British colonial rule initiated the modern era of Indian history. Ironically, British colonial administration in spite of playing a positive role in transforming medieval India to modern; it also had serious negative and harmful effects that viciously intimidated the people and society of India. British colonial policy in the language of Marx became the “unconscious tool of history” in bringing about structural changes of the society that have had both negative and positive effects.

The new rulers for consolidating their administrative grip over the country, introduced certain measures that ultimately affected not only the social and economic structure of the society but also the mindset of the population residing both in the rural as well as in the urban social set up of Bengal. Emergence of new British supported landed aristocracy with ownership in land, a class formerly unknown to people of Bengal, the new English educated gentry, British land and fiscal policy and so on, created enormous social and economic crisis that shattered the old social fabrics of the country. British colonial policy utterly failed or it is better to state did not aimed at creating a cohesive new social environment at large for building a well knitted social bonds among the population of a country like India with diverse culture by uniting people of different class, caste, creed and religions.

The old social order that kept the society bounded together for thousands of years suddenly collapsed. Within a very short span of time after British conquest, on the ruin of the medieval India the modern era of Indian history ushered in. The changes were massive. The task was difficult for the society at large to systematically accommodate all the transformations that had been taking place in the social and political arena of the country. Most of these changes had negative consequences that specifically affected the subaltern sections of the society. As a consequence chaos and confusion swigged the

entire country. In order to survive from all the tribulations of the time, different social movements surfaced in Bengal. Obviously most of these movements were organized and participated typically by the lower stratum population of the society who were the most sufferers of the changes. Unprecedented social transformation had started taking place mainly in the rural social spheres of Bengal. But some of these movements were also commenced under the patronage of Kolkata based British backed newly emerged English educated Hindu elite class. Ironically movements initiated by the Hindu upper class remained confined within the class boundary of the elite population and did not create any positive effect on the social and economic life and living of the people in the lower stratum, the most oppressed section of the society.

These poor wretched segments of the society were mostly residents of the rural Bengal. From historical past these people remained subjugated under the upper caste religious elites. They had been suffering from worst form of social and economic oppressions. Their condition further deteriorated under the British colonial rule. After British conquest, their sources of living started narrowing down due to several administrative measures implemented by the British rulers. In particular implementation of Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 that empowered the government to forcibly take away the rights of the *Rayots* on land. Instead, the land ownership was rested on the British created new landed aristocracy, a class that was formerly unknown in Bengal. This measure in particular gave a death blow to the poor peasants of rural Bengal. These poor peasants within a short span of time after British took over of Indian administration, literally became destitute having nothing to live on. The affected population was rather compelled to seek their own way of emancipation from their wretched miserable life. Gradually the seeds of revolutionary movements were sown in the thinking process of the mass people. These rural based social movements were obviously participated mostly by the peasants and the poorer people who from the long past had been subject of torture and discrimination under the iron rules of the upper caste and class elite population. These rural based movements had two different dimensions; firstly, anti British activities in the form of religious reform movements that finally turned into armed revolts against the British rule, and the second type was fundamentally cult or folk religious movements organized under the patronage of the lowest stratum of population of the society. These

cults based folk religious movements were basically tacit in nature and sort of defiance against all religious bigotry, class and caste differences and economic and social oppressions of the elites. The essence of their philosophy was to uphold the dignity of humanity. In this chapter I dealt with the analysis folk religions or cult movements and the background of these movements surfaced in the soil of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

### **5.1. Folk Religion: Meaning and definition**

The social history of Bengal has been illuminated with the surfacing of different cult or folk religious movements that left significant impact on the life and living of the very common people of rural areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a sense these movements surpassed the urban social movements of the elites in terms of winning over the faith and confidence of the mass people. These cult or folk religious movements have immense sociological significance in constructing the social history of Bengal. Folk religious movements of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal in the form of cultic practices were in actual as stated earlier, sorts of indirect insolent movements of the lower class population against the religious bigotry and social discrimination of the upper caste and class population that had been undermining the poor mass people of rural Bengal from the remote past.

It is difficult to provide a precise definition of folk religion. In general folk religions could be termed as popular beliefs; consisting of ethnic or regional religious customs under the umbrella of a major religion, but outside of official doctrine and practices. John Bowker characterized folk religion as either "religion which occurs in small, local communities and does not adhere to the norms of large systems" or "the appropriation of religious beliefs and practices at a popular level. (Co. H. M.; 2009;p.460).

Don Yoder identified five separate ways of defining folk religion. In his first definition Yoder emphasized on the perspective that remains rooted in a cultural evolutionary framework. From this perspective folk religion represents the survivals of older forms of religion; meaning folk religion constitutes "the survivals, in an official religious context, of beliefs and behavior inherited from earlier stages of the culture's development.. Secondly Yoder viewed folk religion as representation of the mixture of an official religion with forms of ethnic religion. Yoder's third definition of folk religion was often employed by the folklorists (ibid). This definition held that folk religion is "the



interaction of belief, ritual, custom, and mythology in traditional societies", which often pejoratively characterized as superstition. (Marion. B; 2004; p.3-4). The fourth definition of Yoder states that folk religion represents the "folk interpretation and expression of religion"(Op.Cit.). This definition would not encompass beliefs that were largely unconnected from organized religion, such as in witchcraft. Yoder therefore altered this definition by including the concept of "folk religiosity" thereby defining folk religion as "the deposit in culture of folk religiosity, the full range of folk attitudes to religion." (Marion. B.). The fifth and final definition of Yoder about folk religion was a "practical working definition" that combined elements from these various other definitions. Thus, he summarized folk religion as "the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion. (Marion. B. *ibid*).

Yoder described "folk religion" as existing "in a complex society in relation to and in tension with the organized religion(s) of that society. It remains relatively unorganized in character that differentiates folk religion from organized religion. (Chris. C; 2009;p. 242). Alternately, the authority on sociology of religion Matthias Zic Varul defined "folk religion" as "the relatively un-reflected aspect of ordinary practices and beliefs that are oriented towards, or productive of, something beyond the immediate here-and-now: everyday transcendence. (Mondal. A. H. 2010; p. 22).

The gist of the above definitions shows that Folk religion could be defined as a type of religious beliefs that abide by the norms and values practiced by very common people of the society by synthesizing popular beliefs and practices. They are commonly animistic in nature. These folk religious beliefs develop within a culture to handle everyday problems of the people. In many contexts these folk religious beliefs co-exist with that of high religious traditions and sometimes even with secular humanism.

Folk religion, sometimes also is defined as popular beliefs of the society which consists of ethnic or regional religious customs under the umbrella of a major religion, but outside of official doctrines and practices. (Weber. M. p.95). Thus we may conclude that Folk religion is "the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion (Saklain. G, 2003; p.23).

The term "folk religion" is generally used to denote two related but separate subjects. "The first of which is the religious dimension of folk culture, or the folk-cultural dimensions of religion. The second refers to the study of syncretism between two cultures with different stages of formal expression, such as the *mélange* of African folk beliefs and Roman Catholicism that led to the development of Vodun and Santería, and similar mixtures of formal religions with folk cultures"(Saklain. G, 2003; p.28).

Four major religions in the present day world have been in dominance and majority of the world population adhered to those religious beliefs. These are: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Along with these major religions, there exist numerous folk beliefs having their own interpretation of life and living, and these religious beliefs could also be termed as minor religions. Whether the followers of these minor religious groups are completely detached or not from the main religious streams, they cherish separate and independent concepts and perception about nature, life, living, supernatural powers and their followers follow a life-style that is different from the major religious trends. The followers of such groups could be termed as sub-communities. These sub-communities at different times emerged in different parts of the world. Although some sub-communities in course of time have dispersed and spread out from their original place of emergence, but in most cases followers of these sub communities remain confined within their places of origin.

In the social history of Bengal one can find the emergence of numbers of such sub communities i.e. Balaharis, Baul, Kartabhoja, Jagomohani, Matuya, Nyada, Sahebhdhani and so on. These groups may also be referred to as 'folk communities'. Before further discussion, it is indeed important to define the word 'folk'. In American Heritage Dictionary of English language 'folk' as a noun meaning:

a) The common people in a society or region and considered as the representative of a traditional of life

and especially as the originator or carriers of the customs, beliefs and art that make up a distinctive culture:

b) Archive of a nation; a people

2. Informal people in general. Often used in plural;

3. People of a specified group or kind;

4. Folks informal;

a) The members of one's family or childhood household; One's relatives;

b) One's parents.

And as an adjective it hints that of, occurring in, or originating among the common people: folk culture; a folk hero.

Idiom; Just folks informal

Down- to-earth, often- hearten. (Gupta. P. S. 2008; p. 24).

In short, folk religion could be seen as a parallel opposite belief of a group of people against the dominant religious belief of the society. In some instances it denotes as popular beliefs consisting of ethnic or regional religious customs under the umbrella of a major religion, but outside its official doctrine and practices. In course of time it turns into as a mainstream religious belief in society. In this sense all major religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism at their primary stage, were initiated as folk religions (Marion, B. *ibid*).

Folk religion basically thus could be viewed as a kind of social and cultural revolt against the oppression, religious bigotry and all sorts of social injustice. In fact all the major religions at their initial phase emerged as cult or folk religious movements and finally stood against all sorts of negative social order, against vague social beliefs and customs that are being used by the ruling class in the name of religion for keeping the general mass subjugated and exploited under their domination. In other words we may say that, folk religion is a belief that is popularly accepted by the very common folks of the society to fight against deprivation of their due rights in the social, religious and cultural life of their own society and also for their own salvation.

## **5.2 Emergence of Folk Religions**

It is evidently clear from our discussion above that all the major religious doctrines of the present day world initially debuted as folk religious movements. At the initial phase, the goal of all these religious doctrines was to salvage the oppressed segments of the population from all sorts of exploitations and oppressions of the ruling class. This relation between oppressed and the oppressor ultimately turns into dialectical contradictions in the form of cultic movements. The deprived and exploited groups of a society look for their own emancipation and salvation from the clutches of the ruling class and ruling

religious dogmas. To fight against all forms of oppressive ideologies and to free them from oppressive ruling class of the society, the oppressed subaltern population on their own forms an ideological shelter that suits their own social and psychological needs and finally emerge as the cultic or folk religion. On the other hand, the ruling class with all their might and forces try to suppress all these defiant views by force with the help of established religious doctrines. In the process the newly emerged folk religion may or may not survive depending on how far it could reach its core philosophy to the common mass. Thus in the dialectical process, cult movements in the form of folk religion emerge as ideology of the exploited and deprived class of population in a society by opposing the established religious beliefs, norms and values and establish itself as a separate religious doctrine against the ruling religion. This is common phenomena with regard to every cultic movements of the world. Max Weber pointed it as.....diversity of religious attitudes. He viewed, "Within the lower middle class, and particularly among the artisans, the greatest contrasts have existed side by side. These have included caste, taboos and magical religions of both the sacramental and orgiastic types in India, animism in China, Dervish religion in Islam, and the pneumatic-enthusiastic congregational religion of early Christianity, practiced particularly in the eastern half of Roman Empire".(Weber. M. p.95).

The social history of India divulges before us that indigent population of India of which Bengal was a part, never received any social recognition from the upper class population or the rulers as human being, rather they were treated as untouchable, wretched creatures. These lower class population were looked down to such an extent that even they were not allowed to enter in the places of worships or allowed to use common property regimes. The down trodden people of Bengal, for protecting themselves from the wrath of the upper class took a self-determining stand by forming minor religious groups popularly known as *folk religions*. Based on their own understanding about society, life and living; they redefined the essence of human dignity that helped them to fight against all odds by nurturing their own inner strength.

In the first phase of 18<sup>th</sup> century, several folk religious movements in India debuted essentially based on the core essence of Gudiya Vaisnavism by Chaitnya Dev. As well as these cultic religions also had greatly been influenced by the Islamic preaching of the

Sufi saints. It is mentionable that Sree Chaitnya Dev of Bengal in order to protect Hinduism from the advent of liberal Islamic ideology, eased the existing Brahminical doctrines and caste discrimination and opened the door for mass people irrespective of their class caste and creed for participating in the religious rituals formerly which were restricted for the upper caste members only. His preaching was especially targeted towards indigent low caste Hindu population who during that period of Bengal history, in groups influenced by the liberal socialistic ideology of Islam, started converting themselves to Islam. Initially Chaitannya Devs attempts to liberalize traditional strict caste based Hinduism opened a new horizon for the subaltern groups in upholding the dignity of their rights in society as human being and as well to perform freely their religious activities. Before the introduction of Gaudiya Vaisnavism by Chaitannadev, all religious rituals, customs and performances were under the strict control of the handful of upper caste people only. It was Chaitanya Dev who turned the situation in favor of the lower class and caste people by liberalizing the Hindu religious doctrines. Through the teaching and preaching of Sree Chaitanya Dev it was ensured that the Brahmins who considered themselves as the sole agents of religion and religious activities were nothing but representatives of God, but at the same time indigent people of society also had equal importance to God as well. Thus the preaching and philosophy of Chaitanya Dev helped down trodden people to think, revolting against malpractices of the Brahmins and other ruling class people in the name of religion. Chaitannyadev's teaching helped them to think in their own way for their own salvation. On the other hand, Islamic Sufi-ism brought a liberal outlet that also triggered the process of liberal thinking among common people for upholding their rights in the society. Liberal Sufi- Islam which is commonly termed as folk Islam of Bengal, left unprecedented impact on a large section of population especially on the down trodden population, who, in the name of religion had been exploited from historical past by the upper caste elites of the society. These wretched people found their way of salvation in liberal Sufi Islam. Influenced by the Sufi philosophy the exploited mass started thinking about own rights and the way for their salvation from inhuman social system. They learned to feel that all are equal in front of the Almighty. The teaching of Sufi Islam helped the subaltern population to interpret the

Holy Scriptures in their own ways by exploring the philosophical crux of religion which also paved the way for the emergence of other folk religions in Bengal.

Thus; in different parts of Bengal parallel cult philosophies emerged under the patronage of non-privileged lower class population of the society in the form of folk religions. It is worth mentioning that influence of Sufi philosophy could be termed as one of the principal root-causes of the emergence of folk religions in Bengal. The reason is, before the introduction of Sufi-ism in India the religious bigotry was static and the religious set up of India had a solid foundation based on rigid caste system. Chaitannya Dev's attempt to liberalize Hindu religion was basically aimed at protecting Hinduism from the advent of Islam as we have already mentioned and as such in the long run it failed to protect the interest of the lower stratum of population. But the advent of Sufism in Bengal, gave a serious jolt in the social and religious spheres of the country. The spread of Islam was made possible by the preaching of Sufi saints. These Sufi saints as has already been mentioned called for a social amity among people of different social stratum, irrespective of class caste religion and creed. Their simple life and living, treatment of general mass without any prejudice and call for a building a system without any discrimination, obviously attracted poorer and untouchable segments who had been prey of social and economic discrimination of the elites for thousands of years.

Consequently in order to find out the way for their own emancipation from all sorts of social bigotry, prejudice and discriminatory attitude of the elites, the subaltern population turned their face towards the preaching of the Sufis. The rural artisan groups who could not think themselves even as human being due to existing social customs, under the influence of Sufi preaching started to rethink about the meaning of life. The impact of Sufism in Bengal was massive in changing the religious life pattern of the common people of the soil.

### **5.3 Sufi-ism in Bengal**

There are various different opinions about the advent of Islam in Bengal. It is believed that Islam was brought to Bengal by the Sufi saints (Dervishes). Historical accounts state that Sufis first stepped in the coastal area of Cox's Bazar in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Sufi Dervishes along with Arab merchants arrived in Bengal to preach the Islam in the light of inner essence of the Quranic philosophy. Prof. Abdur Rahim remarked, 'It is clear that

the Arab merchants visited the coastal regions of Bengal from the mouth of Meghna to Cox's Bazar and marketed its commodities such as, the fine Cotton cloth (muslin) and aleo-wood. (Rahim. A; p.-23).

The Sufi Dervishes after stepping down in the soil of Bengal started preaching the liberal and socialistic teaching of Islam. This preaching on Islam opened a new vista in the way of thinking of the subaltern population on the meaning of life and living as human being. A new hope was unwrapped before them. A sky touching canvas became visible before them a canvas, on which they could, drew paintings of their life and living based on their own thinking and by using different colors of life freely. In groups, subaltern population started converting to Islam. Islam gained wide popularity among the very common people of the society. One of the reasons for unprecedented success of the Sufis in changing the mindset of the mass people in Bengal was because; Sufi-ism preached their philosophy by adopting the local custom and transformed the Arabic Sufi-ism into Bengali Sufi-ism. Sufis, to cope up with the local folk *Sadhanas* introduced Sufi *Sadhanas* in the light of Bengali customs and culture. This helped Sufi *Sadhana* to become closely affiliated with the local people's way of thinking. Subaltern people thus in Sufism could find out the path of their liberty, through both their local custom as well as by the help of Sufi-liberalism that ignited in them the zeal to uphold the flame of their dignity as human being in the society. Shashibhusan Dasguta in his book entitled 'Obscure Religious cults of Bengal' stated that, 'The Pantheism or rather the Panentheistic mysticism of the Upanisads, the devotional mysticism mainly in the Vaishnavite line and the Sahajiya movements offered Sufi-ism a ready field and this accounted for the speedy growth and spread of Sufi faith in India.' However, from the twelfth century A.D. the history of India actually represents a history of contact, conflict and compromise- political, cultural, and religious. During this period of contact Sufi-ism in India served very well as a medium of compromise between different class, creed and religions and this worked as an additional advantageous aspect that could be held as a reason for the wide-spread popularity of Sufiistic thoughts (Dasgupta. S. B.; p. 168). This is why, lower class people en-mass started converting themselves to Islam by discarding their own faith with a hope to get rid of oppressions of Brahminical religious bigotry. It is stated in the Social and Cultural History of Bengal (Vo-II, Karachi, 1967) that, "Another

equally important factor about the increase of Muslim population was the missionary and proselytizing zeal of the great Sufis who preached the principle of Islam”.

In fact the Sufi missionary activities were first started by Arab navigators and merchants long before the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khaliji. The Sufis came from the Iran through a long hazardous and perilous journey. They sacrificed everything in their earthly living in order to uphold human dignity of the subaltern population of Bengal to the high standard of Islamic civilization. The mass people of Bengal were at that period groaning under oligarchic oppressive rule of the so called upper caste Brahmin believed to be blessed by the heavenly Gods. It is therefore needless to say that, it was Sufi-ism that brought mobility in the arena of religious thinking of the people of Bengal after thousand years of long religious stagnancy. Soon after the introduction of the Sufi-ism in the religious life of Bengal, massive changes started taking place in the religious beliefs of the people of the land, especially among the people of lower class and caste.

In this situation Vedant religious faith that had been dominated by the upper caste Brahmins started eroding very rapidly. Consequently the appearance of a savior in the caste based arena of Bengal became a necessity of time to protect the Vedant or Brahminical religion or Hinduism from the advent of Islam. At this juncture of Bengal history, Sri Chaitanya Dev appeared as a redeemer of Hinduism. He became the torch bearer of a Hindu religious reformism in Bengal. As mentioned earlier, Chaitanya Dev liberalized the religious doctrines of Vedant Hinduism and ensured the free access for participation of all people irrespective of class and caste in all religious activities. In his teaching and preaching Chaitanya Dev focused mainly on the love for humanity. He decreed that just utterance of ‘Hari nam’ is enough to get emancipation for everyone and every people have the right to utter the Hari nam. Chaitanya Dev’s call for upholding human dignity positively impacted the people from the lower class immensely and was convinced that they found a shelter under the philosophy of Harinam. Thus Chaitanya Dev eased religion and religious practice for the very common people avoiding the grandeur of the ritualistic Puja and worships which was confined only among the Brahmins and upper caste Hindu population. This move of Sri Chaitanya played a vital role in protecting the Hindu religion from eroding due to the advent of Islam. But ironically under the veil of Goudiya Vaisnavism introduced by Sri Chaitanya Dev, a



new deep rooted form of Brahminical religion started to be formed in Bengal. Brahmins joined hands with Sri Cahittanaya Dev. He formed a council of 499 members among whom 266 were Brahmins. Everything ran well under the leadership of Sree Chaitanya. But soon after the death of Chatanya Dev, the scenario started changing. The reformative movement of Chaitannya Dev lost its pro people character and again the leadership of the movement went into the grip of the Brahmin class. The Vaisnavite cult again turned into the cult of Bharmin and upper class population in which there was no space for the wretched subaltern people. The lower class and caste segment of population once again fell into deep obscure situation in the society with uncertain future. But this changed situation could not stop the hapless population in their attempt to free themselves from the clutches of the elites. They again ventured for new movements for their own salvation and consequently different cultic or folk religious movements steamed in the soil of Bengal parallel to Gaudiya Vaisnavism. These movements started to flourish within one hundred years after the death of Sree Chaitanya. This is the direct socio-political-economic and religious background of the appearance of folk religions in Bengal. But at the same time we have to perceive that the philosophical history of the advent of folk religions in India is more ancient. It rooted long back to Vedic period. During Vedic period, a parallel opposite philosophy to Vedant philosophy had in existence practiced by the common people of the society. This philosophy was basically a defiant ideology against Vedant philosophy and is known as Loakayat Philosophy.

Folk religions cannot be conceived as jugglery of socially deviated imaginations or rituals, rather these are mostly tacit protests against exploitation of the upper class population of the society clad in the veil of religion.

#### **5.4 Philosophical Background**

Essence of all the minor or folk religions has one goal in common- to promote and protect the dignity of human being. Based on this philosophy of life, exploited people of the lower social stratum ventured to explain the reasons for their wretched day to day life experiences added with oppression and suppression of the upper class population of the society on them. These minor religions provided psychological supports and sheltered these poor people by enlightening them about the meaning of life and living from humanistic view points, as well to fight against all odds of life. The philosophical outlook

of all these minor religions is commonly called '*Lokayata Darshan*;' meaning Philosophy of the mass people. Renowned Indologist Rhys Davis stated Lokayat means "*Lokeshu Ayata*" meaning-which ordinary folk people could take control of. Thus *Lokayata Darshan* is the philosophy which folk people could take hold of. Lokayat philosophical trend was dialectically opposite to the philosophy and ideas of the ruling elites. Emergence of Lokayata philosophy could be termed as a tacit revolt of the oppressed mass, against religious and cultural dominance of the ruling class. It was the Vedanta philosophy of the Aryan conquerors which could be said to be the root cause for the development of Lokayata philosophy in Indian sub-continent. (Ibid: 74).

As mentioned earlier the socially suppressed and persecuted common people led the development of *Lokayata* philosophy, a philosophy that awakened and enkindled the inner feelings of the exploited mass to uphold human dignity, equality, fraternity and brotherhood.

The core crux of *Lokayata* philosophy portrays human being as the supreme truth and renunciation in the existence of any supernatural power. Obviously this idea went against the class interests of the ruling elites. As a result conflicts between *Lokayata* Philosophy and Philosophy of the ruling class gradually became apparent. Ruling philosophies were idealistic in nature, as opposed to the *Lokayata* ideas, which were by nature materialistic. *Lokayata* philosophy ruled out the existence of any supernatural being or power as a controlling force of the fate of living beings and nature. Rather this philosophy believed in the supremacy of manhood and thus proclaimed that ultimate truth is human being and religion is nothing but is a means for the rulers to exploit mass people. The end result was, *Lokayata* Philosophy failed to earn any recognition or supports, rather faced severe opposition from the ruling class. Thus two dialectically opposite philosophical trends in ancient India could be visible -the *Lokayata* (Folk based) Philosophy and Philosophy of the ruling class.

Among *Lokayata* philosophies it is noteworthy to mention the name of *Charvaka* philosophy which could be termed as a direct revolt against priesthood and social inequalities in the name of caste and religion. *Charvaks* were followers of *Brihoshpoti* the Dev Guru, for which they were named *Barhospotto* or *Lokaytik* meaning folk devotees. *Brihoshpoti Loukkya* or *Brahmonnoshpoti* of Rig Veda first declared that 'matter' is the

final truth. *Lokayitiks* were materialists in their ideas and opposed idealist philosophy. B. Tiwary in his book 'Secularism and Materialism in Modern India' says,

'... The inner movement of the mind of the Charvakas seems to have been mainly centered on a revolt against priest-craft: It is in the context of the emptiness and formalism of the latter-day Vaidika rites and ceremonies that one can best appreciate the essence of the Charvaka ideology. (B. Tiwary. p. 351).

Thus the common characteristic of all *Lokayata* philosophies was their defiant nature against all social oppression and discriminations in the name religions and to uphold the dignity and supremacy of human beings. It is note-worthily for its syncretic character. From the spirit of *Lokayata* philosophy along with the influence of Sufi-ism and the teaching of Sree Chaitanya Dev, cult religious movements gradually emerged in Bengal.

From the above discussion, we may summarize that in Bengal, religious oppression on lower class population was very common. Caste divided Hindu society for centuries, continued religious oppressions on lower caste population and that was so rigid that people of lower caste did not have the sense to think themselves as human being. In this juncture of time Sufis started preaching the liberal Quaranic ideology of equality of all human being, irrespective of class creed and color and religion. They preached the class and casteless idealism of Islam. This teaching attracted mass people from the lower caste and they found a shelter for their own salvation and en mass started converting to Islam. This mass conversion of the lower caste Hindu population became a threat against the upper caste ruling elites who in the name of religion kept the lower caste population subjugated for centuries and used to treat them inhumanly. To protect their class interest the Hindu caste elites became anxious to stop the advent of Islam. Consequently we find in history the emergence of Sree Chaitanya who appeared as a savior of Hindu religion by putting the veil of liberalizing traditional Hindu religion. Sree Chaitanya's preaching was a great relief for the class based Hindu society of Bengal and mass conversion of the lower caste population to Islam slowed down. But, soon after the death of Sree Chaitanya the leadership of the Godiya Vaishnabism again went under the grip of the higher caste ruling elites and lost its liberal essence of humanity and again turned into a tool of religious exploitation. The result was, the down trodden population again tried to find out

another shelter for their own salvation. By defying the traditional religious values and rituals the lower class people started explaining religious life of their own, formed their own code of conduct, rituals and values by forming different cults. These cult based groups at the end emerged as the folk religious groups in the soil of Bengal. Renowned folklorist Sudhir Chakraborti stated ‘the philosophy which showed direct defiance against Vedantic philosophy is Charvaka philosophy which is believed to be the initiator of Indian materialism. As we know that Charvaka has no history of its own. Charvaka philosophy developed among the common people of the society who had no social position or any religious status. The Charvak philosophy was thus basically a revolt against the elite priesthood that raised the wall of social disparity under religious veil among people of the society. Charvak philosophy emerged as a protest against vilification of the poorer segment of the society in the name of religion with irrefutable logic. We come to know about Charvaka philosophy from the criticism of the Vedantic pundits. Thus with the direct influence of Sufi-ism Karthabhaja, Shahebdhani emerged as a syncretic religion. The liberalism and syncretism is the best example. (Chakrabarti. S. *ibid*; p. 31). Same statement is made by Mofizur Rahman Runnu. He said that “the role of Vaisnavism in negation of caste disparity did not continue for long. Soon after the death of Sree Chaitanya Dev it turned into the social scripture based orthodox religion. Vaisnavic scripture started to treatise in Sanskrit language. Gradually Vaisnavism became a part of the Bhrahminic religions” (Runnu. M. R. 2012; p. 27).

We may conclude that all the folk religions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal emerged basically for the salvation of the lower class and lower caste population from the oppression of the upper class and caste population and to mitigate social disparity among them. Sudhir Chakrabarti mentioned that in eighteenth century folk religions emerged in Bengal with its revolutionary character. The revolt against social religions and social disparity by the down trodden population of the society acted as the direct reason for the appearance of folk religions. All the innovators and preachers of folk religion came from lower class and caste families. They also were victims of caste and class disparity and social oppression and persecution. This is why these people defied their caste and class identity and proclaimed the highness of human being assertively. The basic essence of all the folk religions was to emphasize on human superiority over supernatural power, to uphold

human dignity instead of proclaiming the highness of any religious deity or supreme being. In folk religion it is more important to worship human being instead of God. All folk religions augment the dignity of women in society. They give more importance to earthly material life rather than that of ecstatic life after death. Thus they emphasize on the importance on bodily wellness rather than the soul. They considered their cultic songs holier rather than *Mantras* and they gave importance on man rather than on God. (Chakrabarti; S. ibid. p. 156).

In many instances it was observed that the defiance of the lower class population against the oppression of ruling class in the name of religious doctrines, at the end turned into social revolution. It takes different forms in different countries. This revolts against social disparity and the oppression of upper class sometimes takes the form of national revolution. In Europe such cult movements against the oppression of Pope and feudalism became apparent in sixteenth century. These movements tried to establish an equitable society having no disparity between rich and poor. We can mention here about the Tabright Movement, Diggers' Movement and Poor Brotherhood Movement. The ultimate goal of these movements were to augment the dignity of manhood. Likewise, some movements also emerged in the soil of Bengal organized by poorer segment of the society.

### **5.5 Different schools of Folk religions of Bengal**

Rural peasantry and artisans of this land that we now call Bangladesh, could be termed as the real architect of imperative national values, traditions, rituals, crafts and culture. These traditional values, social order and culture are yet to be diminished from our social life. Primal mode of production of the indigenous population of this land had been in existence along with that of feudal and semi feudal production system for centuries (Ronald Segal: The Crisis of India). Primordial culture, rituals and religious beliefs of the rural population still have parallel existence with that of urban cultural life. These beliefs and religious life pattern are different from that of ruling ideas and religions and are known as minor or folk religions.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, H.H.Wilson, Akhsay Kumar Dutta and Jogendranath Bhattacharya published their books respectively entitled, *The Religious Sects of the Hindus*, *Bharatiya Upasak Samproday* (Worshipper Communities of India) and *Hindu Castes and Society*.

In these books the writers narrated about the reasons for the growth of different minor religions in India and the life pattern of their followers, their contemporary scholars failed to realize the importance of these narratives. It was beyond their thinking that in future, these minor religious sects of Bengal will emerge as an important academic discourse for the scholars (Chakrabarti S. P 256).

The lists of such minor religions are lengthy. These are: Baul, Nera, Dervish, Sai, Aul, Sadhdhiniponthe, Shoihojia, Khushi Bishshashi, Radhashyami, Ram Sadhania, Jogobondhu Bhojonia, Daduponthe, Ruidahis, Senponthe, Ramsonehi, Mirabai, Biththalvokto, Kortavaja, Sposhtodayik ba Rupakbiraji, Rambollovi, Shahebdhoni, Bolorami, Hazroti, Gobrai, Paglanathi, Tilakdashi, Darponarayani, Bori, Otibori, Rdhaboloovi, Shakhivabuki, Charandashi, Harishchandri, Sadhanponthe, Chuiharponthe, Kuraponthe, Boiragi, Naga, Akhraduara, Kamdhenni, Motukdhari, Songjogi, Bar shomproday, Mahapurushio Dharmi Shamproday, Jogomohoni, Horibola, Ratbhikari, Bindudhari, ontokuli, Satkuli, Jogi, Gurudashi Vaishnab, Khandito Vaishnab, Koron Vaishnab, Go Vaishnab, Nihoingo Vaishnab, Klaindi vaishnab, Chamar vaishnab, Harobyashi, Ramprahsadi, Borogal, Nowshlori, Chaturvuji, Farari, Banshoi, Ponchodhuni, Vaishnab Toposhshi, Agori, Margi, Poltudhashi, Apaponthe, Satnami, Daria dasi, Buniad dasi, Ahjamadponthe, Bijmargi, Abodhuti, Vingol, Manvabi, Kishorivojoni, Kuligayen, Toholia or Nemo vaishnab, Jonni, Shorvolmi, Noreshponthe, Doshmargi, Pangil, Beurdashi, Fakirdashi, Kumvopatia, Khoja, Gouribadi, Bame Koupini, Kopindra Poribar, Koupinchara, Churadhari, Kobirponthe, Khaki and Mulukdashi. Some of the above minor religions originated from Vaishnavism of Sri Chaittanadev in Bengal, some religious beliefs were all India based and many of these religious sects are combinations of Hindu and Muslim ideology, particularly Sufism.

Among the above mentioned folk religions, in Chapter 6 next I have tried to throw lights on four major folk religions that attracted many people from the nook and corner of Bengal. These are Shaheddhoni, Balhari and Kartabhoja.

## CHAPTER 6

### Major Cult Movements in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal

#### 6.0 Introduction

Eighteenth Century could be termed as the turning point of Bengal history. It was the time when Bengal had been passing through a transitional period and consequently medieval Bengal gradually stepped into the modern era. The new rulers of Bengal the British, played the key role in this rapid transformation. Marx stated “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia” (MECW-Vol-12, P217). England’s mission of destruction was more evident in all spheres of life as compared to its regenerative endeavors.

We have already mentioned earlier that in order to resolutely establish their rule in this land, the British destroyed the social fabrics of Bengal society by “breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by leveling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins.” (ibid. P 217). Thus British conquest of India brought immense sufferings for the general mass by imposing their own supremacy over India.

However; ironically even in pre-British rule the condition of the mass people was not very blissful. It is evident from the contemporary literature, historical sources and other records that, the lower stratum of population, both Hindus and Muslims, had little or no social recognition and even was considered untouchables by the social nobilities. This situation further deteriorated with the coming of the British as the new rulers of the land. To assert their rule in Bengal soil, the British administration introduced certain acts and laws that directly and negatively affected the lower stratum population of the society. In particular, as we have mentioned earlier, the Permanent Settlement Act of 1795 that uprooted the traditional rayots from the land and created a new sycophant land owning class under the patronage of British rule devastated the economic base of Bengal permanently. The rayots or the farmers, who constituted the majority population and belonged to lower layer of the society were considered as untouchable by the elites. Due to the imposition of the act they gradually turned into destitute after British conquest and had nothing of their own except their body. Being psychologically, socially, and economically

oppressed and depressed, this huge mass people, always sought relief from oppression of the rulers and the nobilities.

To protect themselves from the wrath of the upper caste and higher class population, these people formed their own social ideas, ideologies and groups and tried to explain the world around them, sought answers for the reasons of their own miserable condition and how to get rid of the same. Thus, in the course of history we can observe that certain cult based religious movements emerged during Muslim rules in India. These cult movements had twofold objectives; such as to provide shelter to the socially wretched population and secondly to protect the Vedic Hindu ideology from the advent of Islam. Islam with its ideological philosophy of equality; fraternity and universal brotherhood attracted economically, socially deprived lower class people of Bengal who were chained by the caste based rules and regulations that denied all human rights to them. Some of these movements continued even after British conquest and as well, some new movements also emerged during the same period.

Sociologist Roy Wallis (1945–1990) argued that a cult is characterized by "epistemological individualism", meaning that "the cult has no clear locus of final authority beyond the individual member". Cults, according to Wallis, are generally described as "oriented towards the problems of individuals, loosely structured, tolerant and non-exclusive", making "few demands on members", without possessing a "clear distinction between members and non-members", having "a rapid turnover of membership" and as being transient collectives with vague boundaries and fluctuating belief systems. Wallis asserts that cults emerge from the "cultic milieu (Wallis Ray: 1975 as quoted in Wikipaedia 2017)."

In 1978 Bruce Campbell noted that cults are associated with beliefs in a divine element in the individual. It is either Soul Self, or True Self. Cults are inherently ephemeral and loosely organized. There is a major theme in many of the recent works that show the relationship between cults and mysticism. Campbell brings two major types of cults to attention. One is mystical and the other is instrumental. This can divide the cults into being either occult or metaphysical assemblies. On the basis that Campbell proposes about cults, they are non-traditional religious groups based on belief in a divine element in the individual. There is also a third type. This is service-oriented. Campbell states that "the kinds of stable forms which evolve in the development of religious organization will bear a significant relationship to the content of the religious experience of the founder or founders (Bruce Campebell : 1978)."



During eighteenth and 19<sup>th</sup> century in Bengal number of cult based religious faiths evolved. Basically these movements were “non-traditional religious groups based on the belief in a divine element in the individual.”(Chakraborti. S.2003;p.17). These cult based religious movements could be termed as defiant movements not only against the traditional religious faiths, but also against the social norms, rituals and authorities that were the causes for their abject social condition. In the following discussions I attempted to focus on some of the major cult based religious movements that immensely impacted the life and living of general people in 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and beyond. This chapter dealt with the analysis of the meaning of major folk religions or cult movements that surfaced in the soil of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and had relevance in the emergence of Baulism.

### 6.1 Shahebdhani Cult

Shahebdhani emerged as an important cult religion during the first phase of nineteenth century in Dogachia-Shaligram area of Nadia district of Bengal in undivided India. Akshay Kumar Dutta was the first researcher who brought in light the documented facts about Shahebdhani cult in his book entitled *Bharotbarsher Upashak Smaprodoy* published in 1870 (M. Sipra : p.13). He wrote “... legend has it that in the jungle bordering Shaligram-Dogachia and other villages, there lived a ‘Udashin’ ....Rabindranath Das of Boigari, Dukhiram Pal of Dogachi and few other Hindus and one Musalman became his disciples. The name of Udashi being Shahebdahni, the sect came to be called as Shahebdahni sect.”(M.Sipra: p13) Later on, scholars like Dinesh Chandra Sen, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, also wrote about this cult.

In course of time Sahebdhani cult gained much popularity among the lowest of the low caste in Bengal. The followers of this cult consisted of people from the untouchables and other lowly castes. The Bagdi, Dhopa, Chandal, Dom, Shnuri, Gnorl, Chamar, and others were followers of this sect. Interestingly a significant fraction of the followers were also economically depressed Muslims. However, no caste Hindus could be found among the followers of the cult. This finding cannot be generalized for all the cult religions that appeared in Bengal. In some instances it could be observed that some religious sects initiated entirely by the lower castes, did sometimes include caste Hindus as their cult members. (ibid p 303).

One Charan Paul son of Muli Paul popularized *Shahebdhani* among the low caste population of rural Bengal. A legend says Charan Paul was a cowboy. One day, when he was grazing his cows, a Muslim Fakir suddenly appeared before him and asked him to milk from an infertile cow in the herd. The puzzled Charan started milking the cow and surprisingly noticed that the Fakir disappeared suddenly. Startled Charan followed the footprint of the Fakir in order to locate him.

Finally Charan reached a place known as *Agradweep* and found the Fakir. The Muslim Fakir became very pleased to see Charan's sincere desire and devotion to find him out. The Fakir accepted Charan as his disciple and Charan was blessed by the Fakir with some magical power. Fakir gave him a new name as Charan, because, Charan found him just following his footprint or in Bangla 'Charan chinho'. Though nothing is known about Charan's real name but finally he became Charan Paul and later emerged as a great preacher of *Saheb dhoni* community. But these are all legends and beliefs of his followers and actual truth is still illusive about this man.

It is interesting to note that in the emergence of *Saheb dhani* community a Muslim Fakir played great role. In fact to some extent it is true for most other folk religions of Bengal. The preaching of *Shahaeb dhani* among the lowest of the lower class gave a momentum to the economically destitute, socially forbidden people of the rural Bengal a new meaning of life. Like most of the folk/cult religions of Bengal, *Saheb dhani* also adopted the love theory of Radha-Krisna. This is why *Radha* and *Krisna* are considered as *Ovatar* in *Saheb dhani* community along with inseparable Sufi influence on it. As mentioned earlier, *Saheb dhani* was introduced under the direct influence of a Muslim Fakir and consequently adopted Sufi-ism as inner essence of its philosophy. Like other folk religions of Bengal, this cult equally put emphasis on woman as force and it is believed that the name *Saheb dhani* is an expression of both male and female spirit. The followers, however, believe that the prefix *Saheb* of *Saheb dhani* indicates a male being and the suffix *Dhani* refers to a female being. It is solemnly believed by the followers of *Saheb dhani* that this cult has been developed with the combined force of male and female. This explain that *Shaheb dhani* religious philosophy combines male and female forces in the image of *Radha* and *Krisna*.

*Sei Brojodhamer Karta jinni*

*Raai Dhani sei naamti shuni*

*Sei dhani ei Saheb dhani.*

### **Translation**

He who is the Chief (*Karta*) of Brajodham

She is none but Raai

That *Raai* is the *Saheb dhani*.

The above verse indicates that, *Shaheb dhani* cult had emerged and flourished under the direct influence of Sufi philosophy and also nurtured by Gouruya Vaishnaba preaching of *Radha-Krisna* by keeping the love philosophy as its core. Followers of *Shaheb dhani* portray *Radha* and

*Krisna* as their *Ovatar*. In practice followers of *Shahebdhani* put greater emphasis on *Radha* than Krishna. Some believe that *Sahebdhani* cult is named after *Radha* which has been manifested in the above verse. A parallel opinion is that, *Sahebdhani* cult was introduced by a woman. Some verses are composed in connection to this belief as well.

*Achhe ek satya bani*

*Din Doyal Sahebdhani, namer dhani*

*Brojer Raaidhani sei dhani Nadete udoy.*

### **Translation**

There is a truth

*The good doers of men, Sahebdhani the great*

*Is none but Raai, the queen of Broja in Nadiya.*

The significant difference of *Shahebdhani*, with other folk religions of Bengal is that in all other cult religions of Bengal Sree Chaitanya had been considered as the main *Ovatar*, but it was *Sahebdhani*, where, instead of Sri Chaityannay *Radha* was portrayed as the principal *Ovatar* and thus female being had been given most importance as the cultic force in its philosophical development.

From the above verse it appears that *Sahebdhani* originated from the name of *Radha*. But there are differences in opinion about its genesis and about the initiator as well. Akkshoy Kumar Dutta in his book titled *Bharatbarshiyo Upashak Samprodai* placed his comment about the origin of *Shahebdhani* states that, a saint lived in a jungle on the border of *Saligram, Dogachhiya* and some other villages of *Krishnanagar* district. He was a devoted saint and lived simple life and always had been trying to do good to the people. Raghunath Das, the inhabitant of *Bagadi*, Dukhiram Paul of *Dogachhiya* and some other Hindus and Muslims in course of time became his disciple. His name was *Sahebdhani* and it is said that after his name *Sahebdhani* community got its name. (Datta A.K.; p. 230).

A prominent folk researcher Sudhir Chakrabarti thinks similar about the origin of the *Sahebdhani* cult. He visited *Saligram Dogachhiya* in 1968 for his fieldwork on *Sahebdhani* community and traced the name of Karta of *Sahebdhani* community as Muli Ram alias Muli Chand Paul which is mistakenly written as *Dukhiram* by Akkshoy Kumar Dutta. It is believed by the followers of *Sahebdhani* cult that it was Muli Ram Paul who first introduced *Sahebdhani* cult and his son Charan Paul popularized *Sahebdhani* cult. Muli Chand (believed as Muli Paul) had three sons. They are Thakur Das (died immaturely leaving no ancestor), Charan Chand and

Gobardhan. The ancestors of Gobardhan still are alive in *Dogachhiya*. The middle son Charan Paul popularized this *Sahebhdhani* cult and had an important part in flourishing it the as a cultic philosophy in Bengal. It was Charan Pal who transferred the *Asan* of *Sahebhdhani* or the main center or *Gurupath* to *Bittihuda* a place where it is presently located.(Chakraborti S.; 2003; p.-26).

Unlike other folk religions of Bengal followers of *Shahebhdhanai* do not offer their worship to any *Guru* rather they avoid it. Instead, they worship the *Asan* (seat: a cot) of *Din Doyal* (*Good doers of human being*) as one of the worshipable being of *Sahebhdhani* community. On every Thursday followers of the community get together around the *Asan* and worship the same by offering flowers. On the worship day, the followers made different kinds of foods and after offering the food items to the *Asan* they share it within themselves consisting of both Hindus and Muslims. At the midnight they draw an end to their worship by eating foods offered to the *Asan* sharing with all by singing devotional songs. This ritual is called *Parmatha Sadhan*.

During the offering sick persons also join the prayer and promise to offer a particular sacrifice to that *Asan* in hope of getting remedy from maladies. If cured then the patient offers the promised sacrifice to the *Guru* of the *Asan*. By this way a lot of money is earned and at the end of the year, in the month of *Chaitrya*- the last month of Bengali calendar, the cult members arrange a grand yearly festival.

Supporters of *Shahebhdhani* do not believe in caste system and allow both Hindus and Muslims and people from other religions to become members of their community. They address the Hindu disciples in their cultic term as ‘*Cling*’ *Dinonath Dinobondhu*’ and Muslim as *Dinodayal Dinobonhdhu*. (Dutta. A. K. *ibid*).

However, In spite of having different theories and beliefs about the genesis and development of *Sahebhdhani* community the followers now believe that it was a Muslim Fakir and a Muslim female, jointly preached the *Sahebhdhani* cult and with the endeavor of Charan Paul it reached its zenith. This view is also supported by some scholars as well. The contribution of a Muslim Fakir and a Muslim woman now is not a hypothesis but a fact. Scholars like Pundit Dinesh Chandra Sen, Prof. Ahmed Sharif also firmly believe in it.

It has already been discussed earlier that there is a belief among the followers of *Sahebhdhani* that the cult was named after a male and a female being representing *Radha* and *Krisna*. Similarly, it is also believed that *Sahebhdhani* has been named after a Muslim Fakir and a Muslim woman. They believe the prefix of *Sahebhdhani*, *Saheb* stands for the Muslim Fakir and *Dhani* for

the Muslim woman again which is the symbolica presentation of the theory duality in one, of *Purush* and *Prokriti* (Male and female) of *Sangkhya Darshan* (one of the *Lokayata* philosophical schools of Indian philosophy).

Sometimes *Sahebdhani* is spelled as *Din Doyal* (the house of Din Doyal). But this term is not quite a popular term among all the followers. Different opinions are there about it as well. Somebody believes *Sahebdhani* and *Din Doyal* are two separate cultic doctrines where *Sahebdhani* is the offshoot of the *Din Doyal* which is mainly confined in giving medicine to the patients and animals. Contrary to this, the other opinion is *Din Doyal* is concerned with pure worship to human, the mainstream philosophical teaching of *Sahebdhani* cult. Some theologians believe that *Din Doyal* is mere a male *Devata* and some other thinks it as an amalgamation of both male and female divinity (father and mother of the universe). *Din Doyal* is the apostle of both male and female power which appeared on the earth. According to some beliefs it is none but the incarnation of the *Shiva* the great and this is why in their *Asan* (seat) they set *Trishul* -a trident used by Hindu ascetics (Chakraborti. S. *ibid*; p.39).

The followers of *Sahebdhani* believe that if *Din Doyal* and *Guru*, have mercy on some one than he or she could get rid from different maladies. The followers of *Sahebdhani* believe that food offered by them to *Din Doyal*'s house through *Guru* (preceptor), attain special miracle power of curing diseases. If any patient eats that food that particular person gets remedy from the disease. Kubir the principal disciple of Charan Paul is a great rhymester of *Sahebdhani* cult. He depicted the above belief in one of his songs. He wrote:

*Amar Charan Chander namer jore*

*Dukhi, papi tapi tore*

*Haap Kashi Gurum byatha*

*Mahabyadhi hoi aram.*

### **Translation**

By the mercy of Charan Chand

All sinners and misfortunes get rescue

And get rid of all kinds of diseases.

Like other folk religions, *Sahebdhani* cult could also be termed as a protest movement of the oppressed poorer segment against traditional religious values and customs, against social discriminations, against caste bound society. Evidently Like other folk religions followers of *Shahebdhani* also stay away from all kinds of rituals based way of life. It also has common

characteristic like other folk religions of Bengal that they did not believe in caste disparity which was the prime element of all major traditional religions of the land. Hence, with a liberal outlook in its core philosophy *Shahebdhani* became the guiding force of the poorer community in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal and its disciples were chosen without any prejudice from all stratum of population. Thus, it is a very normal procedure in *Shahebdhani* cult that a Muslim *Guru* could take disciples from Hindu community and vice versa. No wonder that the destitute, oppressed people from both Hindu and Muslim communities became attracted to this cult. But ironically no members of upper class or caste became attached to this as a disciple. This situation is commonly applicable to most of the folk religions of Bengal.

### 6.1.1 Mantras

Like other folk religions of Bengal, *Sahebdhani* also had emerged as a religion of the destitute, socially forbidden mostly illiterate poorer population of the society. Therefore, the preceptors of the cult narrate the verses (Mantras) before the followers during worship or performing rituals in an easily understandable colloquial language with simple and lucid vocabulary. It helps the followers of the cult who happen to be mostly illiterate rustic villagers, to understand the meaning of the verses without any difficulty and the followers could comprehend the verses and rituals without any ambiguity. Consequently the followers could connect themselves with the ritualistic *Sadhana* with all their devotions and emotions. For instance;

*Sat tabak asman*

*Sat tabak Jamin*

*Daine agni*

*Bame paani*

*Bhog raag kobul koro Deen Doyal Sahebdhani Guru satya.*

#### **Translation**

Seven skies

Seven layers of soil

Fire on the right side

And water on left

Please take my offered food

*Deen Doyal Sahebdhani* Guru (preceptor) is the truth.

In spite of having this linguistic simplicity in their *Mantra*, there is some exceptions, some mantras of *Shahebdhanai* are obscure. These are uttered in symbolic language. For example, we can mention here one such a *Mantra*,

*'Klling Sling Deen Doyal Sahebdhani Sahai'*

The *'Klling* and *Shling'* are symbolic words. Only the true followers of the community can unknot the riddle of the words. It is noteworthy that all the folk religions to some extent use certain symbolic and obscure terms in preaching and teaching of their doctrine, so that the member of the mainstream society cannot understand their inner meaning and it is considered a strong way to keep their religion and their *Sadhana* beyond the understanding of the elite people.

### 6.1.2 Sadhana

Folk religions of Bengal have some common characteristic. For example all the folk religions have esoteric mystic philosophy and mystic way of *Sadhana*. *Sahebdhani* cult is no exception to that. Through mystic rituals a *Sadhak* could attain the supreme bliss. Reaching at this stage makes a *Sadhak* free from all kinds of evil instincts and finally the *sadhak* attains divine power. This helps the *Sadhak* to get rid of earthly desire and sexual lust instead love for humanity becomes prime desire. Like other folk religions of Bengal among the followers of *Sahebdhani* the culture of *Parakiya Prem* (Illicit relation of male and female) is considered as part of their cultic culture. But this is not bodily love affairs rather platonic in nature. The followers of *Sahebdhani* explain this as a process of transforming libido into pure love without bodily desire and an innocent practice of un-embodied true love avoiding all kinds of sex-feeling. If any *Sadhak* cannot avoid temptations of lust in his *Sadhana* he/she cannot attain the ultimate goal, the supreme bliss. In one of the verses of *Sahebdhani* it is depicted,

*Shudhyo nirbikari hoye*

*Kamer ghore probeshiye*

*Kaame kaam nibariye*

*Kaaro kaamer kaaran.*

#### **Translation**

Being pure hearted and free of libido

Go to the sex-yogic practice

Having controlled over libido

Practice sex-yogic Sadhana.

Parakiya Prem (Illicit relation of male and female) is a cultic ritual of Sahebhdhani Sadhana, but as stated above, it has to be platonic in nature without any desire for fulfilling sexual lust. The *Sadhak* must control his/her sex passion and turn it into love passion. When a votary, with pure state of mind could avoid sex in his sex-yogic *Sadhana* only then the votary could reach to his ultimate goal, which is termed in cultic language as *Manushya koron* (true behavior of humankind).

In the process of this secret sex-yogic body mystic *Sadhana* it is noteworthy that, a votary, therefore has to follow different steps for purification and attaining due success in his *Sadhana*. In the very first step of *Sadhana*, one has to purify both body and mind by avoiding all kinds of sensual ill motives. If one could attain that virtue only then a person could deserve to become a *Sadhak* with pure mind and physis. Only after attaining this stage, the *Sadhak* gets permission to recite the holy name of *Din Doyal Sahebhdhani* with solemn devotion and sincerity by following the instruction of cleaning six sensual bad instincts burning with the fire of devotion to *Guru* and *Din Doyal*. One need to clean all the bad instincts that always try to rule the body and directs a person towards the wrong path. In the next stage, when the *Sadhak* could attain desired success by completing all the prerequisite to pass all these stages for proceeding to perform the sex-yogic *Sadhana*, the *Sadhak* is allowed to go to the next and last stage for practicing the secret sex-yogic body mystic *Sadhana* in association with a woman for achieving the ultimate goal 'the supreme bliss' - the state of innocent eternal love feeling- where there exists only pure love feeling instead of all kinds of mundane lure and lust. Reaching this stage the *Sadhak* could turn all of his feelings into supreme bliss of God. In the verse presented below relates to the *Sadhana*. In this verse the true process of *Sadhana* is depicted symbolically.

*Shudhyo nirbikary hoye*

*Kamer ghore probeshiye*

*Kaame kaam nibariye koro kaamer kaaran.*

*Sei kaamini sapini songe*

*Maan bihar koro raso range*

*Jeno sei kal bhujango onge kore na dangshan.*

### **Translation**

Being pure hearted and free from libido

Then proceed to sex-yogic practice

Perform sex-yogic *Sadhana* having controlled over sex.



Swim in the river of love

Play with the adult female serpent very trick-fully

Avoiding her poisonous bite.

In the above verse it is symbolically stated that practicing sex-yogic *Sadhana* with an adult female should be tactfully dealt with so that the *Sadhak* could attain due success in retaining instead of losing *Pritri bostu* (semen). In cultic religions semen is considered as the core essence of human body and is believed that God will take all accounts of this semen in the next world. This is why; followers try to hold semen prior to ejaculation. In all kinds of sex-yogic *Sadhana*, retention of semen is considered as the ultimate goal. For the success in their sex-yogic *Sadhana* votaries are advised to perform sex very carefully so that they do not ejaculate their semen by falling in the trap of sexual lust. This is described in the above verse symbolically. The *Sadhak* must remain careful when playing game with female serpent and must know the tactics to avoid her poisonous bite. If in the thinking process of a *Sadhak* sex feeling governs over the love feeling, then the *Sadhak* must lose the core of life (semen) through the uncontrolled ejaculation and finally will fail to become successful in attaining the capability of retaining semen. When in sex-yogic practice, a *Sadhak* attains the capability of pumping up his semen from downward trend to upward and could keep it fixed in the *Sahasrar* (the top point of the skull) then only the *Sadhak* could annihilate the angry female serpent in the game and could play the game as he wishes as well as the *Sadhak* could get eternal supreme bliss which is the final goal of a votary. Moreover, it is indicated in the verse that for attaining that capacity, one should worship the woman for converting his masculine virtue into feminine; that means one should transform himself for practicing *Sadhana* by thinking as woman through relinquishing his masculine nature. It is believed that when a man could relinquish his masculine nature and his lust for opposite sex, only then male and female turn into a soul-representing 'duality in one' and sex becomes secondary. This is why, in Shahebdani religious ritual the followers believe that in worshipping God the male transforms himself as women devotee not as male devotee, because God has created this universe, and so he represents masculinity, and therefore it is believed in *Sahebdhani* cult that only God is the sole male being and the rest creatures are females. If the *Shadhak* could satisfy God by presenting himself as woman only then he could get the blessings and love of God.

In the *Sadhana* of *Sahebdhani* cult, clear and mixed influence of the *Vaisnava*, Sufi and secret body mystic philosophy as the offshoot of Tantric philosophy simultaneously could be observed.

### 6.1.3 Taboo

Every religion and cultic community has to follow and obey some taboos. In *Sahebdhani* community also some taboos could be traced which are obeyed by all the followers of the cult and is considered as inseparable parts of their religious belief. However, we already have come to know that Charan Paul is the principal *Guru* by whose teaching and preaching *Sahebdhani* community reached its zenith. Charan Paul inherited a pole from the Fakir who was believed to be the originator of the *Shahebdhanai* movement. Cult members have preserved this pole and it is considered as very sacred and venerable. The followers pay their homage to and worship the pole. This pole can be regarded as a symbol of fetishism. A regular bathing of the pole is done and sacred foods are offered to the holy pole with very solemn devotion. The followers of *Sahebdhani* also used to offer food at noon and milk at evening, *Chira*, sweet and fruits and whatever is available to them they offered regularly to the *Din Doyal Ghar* (the house of *Din Doyal*).

Thursday in particular is significant to the followers of *Shahebdhani*. On this day the followers pay their offerings and perform special worship to *Din Doyal*. On Thursday, the followers prepare a very special food dish and after offering to *Din Doyal* the community members take the same with very solemn devotion. In the beginning of the day at 9.00 O' clock the devotees prepare special food strictly with milk and sugar only. All the followers collect this prepared cooking on the next day. In spite of this food festival a special ritual is also performed by the followers of *Sahebdhani*. Fasting Devotees at first offer sweets and fruits to *Din Doyal Ghar* (house of *din Doyal*) and later to the Fakir of the *Asan*. The principal Fakir than distribute this food to the devotees who keep fast. The fasting devotees then break their fast with this specially prepared food. Devotees, who keep fast, are not allowed to eat rice, *Chira*, *Muri* (pressed or puffed rice) or any other food containing protein.

At the initial phase in *Sahebdhani* community, worshipping any idol was strictly prohibited, but at present the followers offer their worship to the idol of *Krisna* by setting the idol in the house of *Din Doyal*. In some cases, they regard *Krisna* as *Din Doyal*. This is the deviation of the followers of the *Sahebdhani* cult in course of time from their core belief.

The followers of *Sahebdhani* cult offer their worship also to cows with highest respect and regard it as a divine idol. In their worshipping process the devotees at first offer their prayer to the cow and then to God. Because, they firmly believe that if they could give proper nurturing to the cow, then it will give them milk and by this milk they could be able to make best food for the

God. They believe furthermore, that their body is under the custody of God, and for this reason, even after this death, in the next life; this body will yield food for God as well. They, moreover, also believe that it is none but *Krisna* who had rendered the best service to cow. the followers also believed that there is no wrong in worshipping the icon of the *Krisna* by setting it in the house of *Din Doyal*. This is how, in monotheistic *Saheb dhani* cult polytheism has gradually intruded.

#### 6.1.4 Festivals

In all religions whether mainstream or folk, festivals play a significant part and acts as a strong medium for community solidarity. Festivals put a strong role in unifying the followers and at the same time it is an important way of earning for many people centering religious rituals in the form of festival. On the special day (the day of festival) devotees come to the festival, offer money and sale different kinds of commodities that augment the financial income to the festival organizer. *Saheb dhani* community has two principal festivals. One of these is arranged in and around Paul house on the *Boishakhi Puirnima* (full moon day in the month of *Boishakh*)- the first month in Bengali Calendar and another one is observed in *Ogrodweep* on the eleventh day of the month of *Chaitrya*- the twelve month of Bengali calendar.

On the full moon day, in the month of *Boishakh*, all the devotees meet at Paul house together. At the very beginning of the day, the followers offer their sacred food by worshipping *Din Doyaler Ghar* (house of *Din Doyal*). Devotees offer *Malsa Bhog* (a special food mixed with fried rice, fruits and fried sweet) to *Din Doyaler Ghar* along with the *Asan* (seat) of *Guru* (preceptor). Besides, the devotees also offer things like rice, *Dal*, cash money or whatever they can afford best. All the stuffs are offered to the feet of the *Guru*. In the very same day, food cooked by the devotees for offering the same to their *Guru* and of *Din Doyaler ghar* (house of *Din Doyal*) and *Asan*(seat) of the *guru*, is served to all devotees who join the festival. In the night followed the special day of festival, all devotees spend time by singing holy songs composed by *Kubir* and *Jadubindo*, the principal versifiers of *Saheb dhani* community who put the core essence of the cult in their songs. These songs, are considered as the *Bhaber Geet* (devotional songs) by the devotees. Sometimes they also sing the songs composed by *Lalon Fakir* as well. In the very next day devotees leave the festival for their own home and prior to their leaving they collect the soil of the courtyard of *Thakur ghar* - in front of the *Asan* (seat) of *Guru* with very solemn mind and comfort. This soil is considered as the spiritual assets for the whole years by the devotees and they believe the collected soil will save them from all kinds of difficulties for rest of the year.

Another three day long yearly festival is held in *Ogradweep* outside *Bittihuda*, on the eleventh day of *Chaitra*, twelfth month of Bengali calendar. The principal Fakir from Paul family takes the *Asan* (seat). Before *Ekadashi* (eleventh day of the lunar month), in the evening, the principal Fakir of Paul family sets out for *Ogradweep* on a bullock cart. Fakir, on the way to *Ogradweep* only once stops for a while to take rest in the house of one of his closest disciple. After taking rest, Fakir again sets out for *Ogradweep* and just after reaching the destination, he takes bath along with the *Trishul* gifted by *Din Doyal* and his Fakiri pole. After that the Fakir takes seat on the *Asan* (seat) by putting a veil of white cloth on his head. It is considered as their cultic symbol. He continues to wear white dress and his veil as long as he remains seated on the *Asan*. According to cultic custom the Fakir has to remain silent as long as he remains seated on the *Asan* (seat) on the day of festival.

On the very first day of the festival only *Chira* (pressed rice) is allowed and offered to the devotees. In this particular day, consumption of plain rice is strictly prohibited according to their cultic custom. Demarcating the *Asan* (seat) and stretching over a new mat on the demarcated *Asan*, the principal Fakir initially takes his *Asan* (seat) and later on as per their custom this *Asan* (seat) transferred on that bullock cart by which Fakir comes in the festival. All devotees offer their worship to Guru and pray for escaping from all sorrows and miseries that they suffer from. According to their cultic custom principal Fakir of *Asan* (seat) does not eat anything for the whole day, but at the midnight he takes food from his selected devotees.

In the second day of the festival in *Ogradweep*, devotees organize food celebration. A huge cooking arrangement by the participants adds a colorful scenario in the festival. All cooked food stock piled in a selected place for distribution among the participants. But, in distributing food a particular custom has to be maintained. For example at the very first day of the festival, they bathe the principal *Guru* seated on the *Asan* by voluntarily participation of the devotees. Before bathing they offer different services to *Guru* such as besmearing oil on the body of *Guru*, by keeping the Fakir seated on the bathing seat the devotees carry him on their leap. Fakir at first bathes his pole then he takes his shower. During bathing of the Fakir the whole area remains covered with cloth so that outsider could not see him during showering time. After having his shower, the principal Fakir sits on his *Asan* (seat) and the *Gomasta*- the assistant of the Fakir sits just in front of his *Asan* (seat) with a *khata* covered by red cloths where he writes down the name of devotees who pay *Khajna* (rent) to *Guru*. Like followers of *other* cults, the followers of *Sahebhdhani* also believe that human body belongs to *Iswar* (God) or *Guru* (preceptor). This is

why; one has to pay rent to *Guru* during bodily living. *Guru* having a long veil of white cloth sits silently on *Asan* (seat) and all the devotees pay rent offering their worship to *Guru* and use to give vermilion to *Trishul*. They after paying rent and homage to *Guru*, collect soil from the front of the *Asan* (seat) with solemn devotion because as mentioned earlier, the devotees believe that one can get rid of all kinds of maladies just by eating the holy soil of this *Asan* (seat).

In the last day, all devotees take their bid to bathe in *Baruni*. There is a myth about this *Baruni*. The myth is like this. One day, mother of the great versifier of *Saheb dhani* named Kubir wished to take a bath in the *Ganges*. Kubir promised to take her to *Ganges*, but unfortunately, he could not keep his promise. Kubir's mother was very upset and disappointed. In the very next year Kubir similarly promised to take his mother for bathing in *Ganges*. But time passed away and the day of the festival of bathing in *Ganges* was about to go over. Kubir's mother reminds his son about his promise. Kubir affirmed his mother about their journey to *Ganges*. But Kubir instead of arranging the journey to *Ganges*, became more engaged in weaving rather. At this Kubir's mother became very anxious about their journey. Neighbors from different villages were going to *Ganges* in groups but Kubir remained busy in weaving. Kubir's mother anxiously reminded Kubir about his promise of taking her to *Ganges*. Kubir again affirmed his mother not to worry. But mother became very disappointed assuming that she won't be able to bathe in *Ganges* in her life. The date of the festival came close and Kubir's mother mentally became more disheartened but Kubir remained steady and calm. On the day of festival of bathing in the *Ganges*, in the afternoon, Kubir asked his mother to get ready for going to the *Ganges*. Kubir's mother became surprised at this because it was not possible to go to *Ganges* in such a short time because it takes two or three days to reach the destination. "Kubir is a crazy", thought his mother. However, after continuous insistence by Kubir, his mother agreed and got dressed and ready for the journey. Both son and mother set out for *Ganges*. After sometimes they reached a village named *Ghoshbhila*. A river named Kumar has passed through the *Ghoshbhila* village. Once it was a river with strong current. By the time Kubir and his mother reached the bank of Kumar the sun started to set down. Kubir standing on the river bank looked at the water of the river Kumar and prayed to mother *Ganges* to flow through the Kumar river. Soon as Kubir finished his appeal, all on a sudden mother *Ganges* appeared before them. Both mother and son offered their worship to *Ganges*. It seemed to Kubir's mother that river Kumar suddenly turned into river *Ganges*. She went down to the water of Kumar and had her bathing. A miracle happened with her. After bathing in that river Kumar she got back her youth at once. When Kubir and his changed young

mother came back to their village home, all the people of the village became astonished and started disbelieving them and their sayings. They started blaming Kubir that he had killed his mother and this young woman whom Kubir brought with him and addressing her as mother was another person. Kubir being failed to make the villagers convinced about the miracle that happened with his mother, went back to the very same place of the river Kumar again and when his mother further had a bath in the same water she became old again. This miracle spread over larger area. People from different villages started coming together on the bank of river Kumar. At *Ghoshbila* village. Everybody started bathing in the new flow of *Ganges*. From that time a regular fair has been arranged in the place where Kubir's mother bathed in the river and is known as *Baruni* mela (Ahmed, Rajib; 2014; p. 12). This is why; *Baruni* is a pilgrimage to the followers of *Sahebdhani* community. From then of the followers of *Shahebdhani*, on the last day of *Ogrdweep* festival go for bathing in the river and it draws an end to the festival. After the end of the festival the principal Fakir by wrapping up his *Asan* (seat) leave the festival along with the money and other articles that were offered to him by his followers. With *Trishul* and *Fakiri Dando* (the pole of Fakir) he starts his journey back by the same bullock cart to *Bittihuda* the main center of *Sahebdhani* cult.

### 6.1.5 Symbolism

Symbolism, in every religion, in more or less has been a part of the *Sadhana* and rituals. Like other folk religions of Bengal, in *Sahebdhani* cult it can also be noticed that symbolism plays important role in their life and living as well as in some of their rituals. Though at the very initial stage, among the members of the *Sahebdhani* community idolatry was absent but today in a smaller scale, the followers of *Shahebdhani* practice worshipping symbols of different objects. The followers of *Sahebdhani* community offer their worship to different natural things. In spite of this, they offer their worship to wooden sandal of the originator of the community as the holy object. The symbols of *Sahebdhani* community are *Trishul* (trident used by Hindu votary), the *Fakiri Danda* (pole of Fakiri), wooden sandal of *Thakur Fakir* and a well-furnished bed. When any disciple gets the authority to give mantras and to make disciples from the principal Guru (preceptor) of the community, they are regarded as the *Asune Fakir* (Fakir of the seat). At this stage the *Asune Fakir* could practice the same rituals and offer worship to *Trishul*, wooden sandal and well-furnished bed. In *Sahebdhani* community with nominal symbolism in their rituals, symbolic language in their mantras and austerities could also be found. More or less this is common to every folk religion because in most cases their mantras and *Sadhanas* were kept

secret. That is why they wanted to conceal it from the understanding of common people. By this way symbolism now is a part and parcel of *Saheb dhani* community.

In all folk religions of Bengal, a common tendency could be observed, that is all these religions had emerged as tacit revolts against the traditional religions which in practice were means of exploitation of the lower class destitute population by the upper class elite population of the land. This is why; it can be observed that all the folk religions started their journey with humanistic approach. This is the principal goal of all folk religions. This is the reason why these folk religions became the common platform for the very common people of the society. Further this humanitarian approach of these folk religions provided a space of breathing for the lower stratum of the society who once was and still in some instances is considered as forbidden communities in the traditional religion based society. This forbidden population in groups came under the shelter of these folk religions as their last resort. But, in course of time, most of these folk religions in many instances, lost their humane character and became indulged in financial exploitation of the devotees. As a consequence, all the folk religions have been passing through critical crisis period and day by day the number of followers is decreasing alarmingly. It is noteworthy to point out that maximum number of folk religions is on the verge of decaying. Like other folk religions of Bengal, *Saheb dhani* also has been suffering from the verge of decaying. However, it is not the only reason for its decline. The reluctance of the principal *Guru* (preceptor) in leading the followers and exploring the inner ethos and pathos of its own philosophy, based on which the cult was founded also is responsible for the decay. Moreover, the principal *Karta*, the progeny of Paul who are now playing the principal part in *Saheb dhani* are busy in looking after their self interest rather than paying attention to preserving the interest of the disciples. As a result, the disciples gradually have been losing their faith from the present day Gurus and this is the principal cause for the erosion in the *Saheb dhani* community as well. These days *Saheb dhani* community has become more ritualistic losing its philosophical commitment. As a consequence the cult is no more able to uphold the interest of the destitute people of the lower strata of the society.

## 6.2 Kortabhoja Cult

The multi faith context of Indian subcontinent especially that of Bengal though is very colorful, but remained elusive in many contexts. Researchers querying about cult based religions of Bengal are bound to “confront time after time the drift of defiance that had emerged from the lower and marginal strata of society (Hossain, D)”. Among the many small deviant sect or so

called 'Obscure religious cult' which proliferated throughout Bengal during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, *Kartabhoja* is a prominent one and "few have remained so enigmatic or so little understood as the Kartabhoja cult believers, the worshipper of Master (Karta)"(ibid)

Founded in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Kartabhoja* gained its momentum within a short span of time and spread over a large area of Bengal Province. The founder of this movement is said to be one Aulchand or Aule Chand (1686-1769). Little written accounts are accessible about Aulchand but a number of legends about him are popular among the followers of Kartabhoja cult. Significant early leaders of this community were, Ramsharan Pal a disciple of Aulchand, his wife Swarasati, popularly known as Sati Ma and their son Dulalchandra Pal. These people were resident of Ghoshpara village located in the Nadia district of undivided Bengal. Under their leadership, Ghoshpara village in course of time became a major centre of activities of the *Kartbhaja* and later became a *Pithsthan* (Holy seat) for the sect (Wikipedia 2017). Till to date a yearly fair is organized in the Ghoshpara, and is known as the Sati Mar Dol Mela, This fair is held in honor of Sati Ma on the day of Dol Purnima in February/March every year and is attended by a large number of followers of this sect.

Mystery shrouds around the origin of Aulchand. Legend says Sri Chaitannya reincarnated as Aulchand among his disciples. The followers of Aulchand used to call him in different names and to the *Kartabahja* community he is known in different names such as Aule Mahaprabhu, Kangali Mahaprabhu, Fakir Thakur, Siddha Purush, Sain Gosain and Purnachandra. There are many legends on Satya Mahaprabhu Aulchand or Aulechand. Later some of these legends were collected by Horace Hayman Wilson and Akshay Kumar Datta. The gist of all these legends is, "in 1616 Saka era (1694), Mahadab Barui a peasant of Ula village found Aulchand an eight year old boy in his betel vine. He decided to adopt the boy who later on became famous as Aulchahnad. After 12 years of staying with his mentor Mahada Barui, Aulchand left Ula and took shelter in the house of a gandhabanik (perfumer) and stayed there for two years. Next, he shifted to the house of a landlord in the locality and stayed there for 14 years. Next one and half years he lived somewhere in eastern Bengal and then started travelling from one place to another. At the age of 37, he came to Bejra village. Here in Bejra one Hatu Ghosh became his disciple. Soon, another person named Ramsharan Pal also became his disciple. Besides Ramsharan Pal and Hatu Ghosh, his principal disciples included Bechu Ghosh, Nayan Das, Laksmhikanta, Nityananda Das, Khelaram Udasin, Krishnadas, Hari Ghosh, Kanai Ghosh, Shankar, Nitai Ghosh, Anandaram, Manohar Das, Bishnu Das, Kinu, Gobinda, Shyam Kansari, Bhimray Rajput,



Panchu Ruidas, Sidhiram Ghosh and Shishuram. He died in Boyale village (in the present day Nadia district) in 1769. The above mentioned 22 persons are being considered as the principal disciples of Aulchand. A myth about these 22 disciples is manifested in the following verse:

‘Aul Chand is a cow of full of milk

And his 22 fellows are his calves.’

It is written in a verse that

‘From where this man of love came

He has no anger, he has smile always in his face

And he always speaks the truth.

22 fellows with him think the same

They upholding their arms with the recitation Joy Karta

Sprinkle love among people.’

In addition to these 22 principal disciples Aulchand had a number of other followers belonging to both Hindu and Muslim communities. The followers of *Kartabhoja* believe that, Aulchand actually is the reincarnation of Sri Chaitanyadev the founder of Gaudiya Vaishnabism. After the death Aulchand, his followers became divided into two major groups. Eight of his principal disciples under the leadership of Ramsharan Pal established a center for religious activities at Ghoshpara. The other group founded their center at Parari village near Chakdaha and cremated Aulchand's body there. The leadership of the group led by Ramsharan Pal became hereditary after his death. Ramsharan's descendants were mentioned as the Shriyut or the Shrishriyut. The sectarian literature of this community mentioned their Gurus (leaders) as the Mahashayas (hosts) and the common members as the Baratis (guests). Some scholars viewed that; *Kartabhoja* could be termed as a parallel religion or a branch of *Chaitanya Sampraday* (Gaudiya Vaishnabism a Cult religious movement initiated by Sri Chaitanya Dev in 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Karim. A. 2013; p.220).

In 1783, Ramsharan Pal died and his wife Sati Ma took over the leadership of the community. She was succeeded by her son Ramdulal Pal or Dulalchandra Pal (1775–1852). Dulalchandra was a lyricist and he wrote numbers of spiritual songs. Later these lyrics were collected by his four disciples and are known as Bhaver Giti (Spiritual Songs). Alongside, almost over 500 other spiritual poems and songs were also written by a number of other poets belonging to this community. These spiritual songs were collected and published in two volumes, titled, *Kartabhojar Gitabali* (1872) and *Shrishriyuter Padabali* (1893). Dulalchandra Pal was succeeded by his wife and after her demise their son Ishvarchandra Pal became the leader of the

cult. After her death Sati Ma was buried under a pomegranate tree near Ram Saran's house. It is believed by the followers of the cult that a handful of dust from Sati Ma's grave could cure any disease and make a person pure by cleaning him or her from sin.

Aule Chand, died around A.D. 1769 near the village of Chakdah in the district of Nadiya. The essence of Aulchan's preaching to his followers was humanity and equality among human being. Aulchand never had differentiated his followers on the basis of caste, class and religions. The followers of Aulchand believe that, he was bestowed with mystical power and with which he could perform many miracles. Such one story is about Aule Chand's crossing of the river Ganges by foot.

The core Mantra of *Kartabhoja* is 'Guru poromsotto' meaning Guru is the ultimate truth.' During inclusion of a person as a member of *Kartabhoja* cult this mantra is bestowed upon the followers. The conversation between the Guru and his new recruit during the rituals performed while accepting a new person in the cult is as follows:

Guru: Will you be able to follow this religion?

Neophyte: Yes.

Guru: You shall not tell a lie, steal or commit adultery.

Neophyte: I will not.

Guru: Say 'You are true, and your word is true.'

Neophyte: 'Thou art true, and thy word is true.'

The followers of *Kartabhoja* believe that Aulchand did not die rather he as a spirit, always remains present within the body of his followers. (Karim. A. 2012; p.54-55). There is a myth among the followers that Aul Chand had a rebirth as Dulal Chand in the womb of Sati Maa. Legend says, *Swarasati* (Sati Maa) and Ram Sharan Paul was very poor village fellows. One day Aule Chand Fakir took shelter in their house. Ram Saran and Swarassati entertained their guest with utmost care and love. They gave the Fakir food and comfort. Meanwhile Sati Maa fell sick from an incurable disease. Aul Chand cured her by sprinkling of water from a pond named *Himsagar*. After this incident the name and fame of Aul Chand spread around and people started respecting him as a holy person. In his death bed Aul Chand promised to Sati Maa that he would take a rebirth as his child in her womb. (ibid ; p.118).

Followers of *Kartabhoja* even today consider water of *Himsagar* pond and soil beneath the pomegranate tree where Satima was buried, as very holy. With solemn devotion the followers

collect the water of the pond and dust of the soil beneath the pomegranate tree with a belief that these can cure any disease or solve any problem of a person.

After the demise of Aul Chand, Ram Sharan and his wife declared themselves as the *Karta Baba* and *Karta Maa* and the followers accepted them as the leaders of the cult and ironically the leadership of *Kartabhoja* became hereditary by losing its democratic character. When in 1783 Ram Sharan died, his son Dulal Chand was 7 years old and for this reason Sati Maa, the wife of Ram Sharan became the leader of *Kartabhoja* and when Dulal Chand reached the age of 16 years Sati Maa handed over the authority of the cult to Dulal Chand. But Sati Maa again became the supreme leader of the cult, when Dulal Chand died at the age of 57 years. Sati Maa once again took over the leadership of the cult and remained so till her death. When she died in 1840, authority of *Kartabhoja* cult went to Paul family. (Chakraborti. S. 2003. p.75). It needs to be mentioned here that, Dulal Chand was a scholar and had good command over *Sanskrit*, English and Persian language. His teaching influenced many people. *Kartabhoja* reached its zenith under the preaching of Dulal Chand. It is said that Dulal Chand had over four lakh disciples, although in 1818 Ward mentioned the number of Dulal Chand's disciples as twenty thousand in second edition of his book. (Dutta. A. K. 2012. p.-221). However, beyond any doubt, it was Dulal Chand who actually established *Kartabhoja* cult on a solid foundation. Dulal Chand was simultaneously a good lyricist. He wrote approximately 650 songs for his fellows of his community. In his verses he left various instructions and various methods of austerity to be followed by his disciples. A compilation of these songs as mentioned earlier is known as *Bhaber Geet* (Devotional Songs) is considered as *Sree Juter Paad* (holy psalm) by his followers. It is mandatory for the followers to recite verses from this compilation in the regular weekly gathering which is held in the evening of Friday. This *Bhaber Geet* (Devotional Songs) is also considered as a book of code for its followers.

The followers of *Kartabhoja* do not address father as father and son as son. They believe that all of them are descendants of one single man who is the guru of the cult. (ibid.p-220). *Kartabhoja* cult performs some distinctive rituals and uses certain symbolic words. These features made *Kartabhoja* cult distinct from other contemporary cults and ideologies. The followers of *Kartabhoja* called its main center at Ghose Para as '*Nitya Dham* or *Bari*. Fellow men of the community welcome each other by addressing as '*Bhagatjan*' (man of God) and general people are welcome as '*Oihiklok*' (Man of mundane). The *Shadak* (Devotee) in *Kartabhoja* cult is stratified into three tiers. These are:

- 1) *Mul Guru Karta*: Supreme one; who spiritually is highly esteemed by the followers and a well versed person. He is the chief person of the community. He holds the authority of the cult;
- 2) *Mahashai*: They are the middle man. They take disciples from common people and inspire their disciples to join *Kartabhoja* cult and;
- 3) *Barati*: Barati is the primary tier of the *Karthboja* cult. They are disciples of Mahashai the Guru. This Barati could be promoted to Mahashai tier after passing of certain time and when the Barati could achieve proper esoteric knowledge of *Kartabhoja* cult.

### 6.2.1 Mantras

The important part of the *Sadhana* of *Kartabhoja* community is to recite the *Bijmontra* continually. In *Bhaber geet* (Devotional cult song) it is stated that, none but only *Iswar* or *Maner Manush* is the best friend on the earth. This is why, more a follower recites the name of *Iswar* or *Maner Manush* (*Karta*), *Iswar* or *Maner Manush* will come more closer to the devotee. So the followers are advised to recite His name throughout the day even during working hours and as well as in leisure period too. They believe that purification of body and mind comes through the recitation of the name of *Iswar* or *Maner Manush* (*Karta*) and in this process all dirtiness is washed away forever.

Different methods are followed by the followers of *Kartabhoja* cult in reciting the name of *Karta*. With pure mind and body, the followers of *Kartabhoja* recite the name two and half times (*Arai Dondo*) in a day. The timing is as follows; one hour at noon, one hour in the evening and at the midnight half an hour altogether two and half hour which is called *Arai Dando* in *Kartabhoja* term. They put emphasis on this time because they believe during these times nature remains calm, animals sleep but God remain awaken. For this reason, if any votary can recite His name during the above mentioned times with full devotion, according to *Kartabhoja* cultic belief, they could get success in their life and all their desires and aspirations will come true. It is forbidden for the followers of *Kartabhoja* to recite the name of *Karta* very loudly or silently.

For the execution of their entreaty the followers of the *Kartabhoja* cult divide their everyday life into three segments. During the first segment of the day (first 8 hours) followers are advised to spend their time for earning, second segment (second 8 hours) for thinking about theology and last segment (last 8 hours) should spent for sleeping. By this way a votary's life is brought under a routine and systematic method. But for general followers it is difficult to lead their everyday life by following this routine in a systematic way. For this reason, a simple way of life had been

proposed for the execution of *Sadhana* for the general followers; especially for those who are family men because family men for different reasons remain engaged with different mundane activities and that make them unable to follow the routine. Alongside they are also advised to follow certain norms and values i.e. to speak truth and behave true to others. It has also been advised that these norms and values should not be taken as a matter of merely verbal utterance but those should be applied in the everyday life meaningfully as eternal truth. All teachings preached by Aule Chand, such as always speak the truth, follow the true path, be honest and be steady in thinking, be rational and be simple in verbal utterance and behave truly to all, are obeyed by the followers very solemnly. It is stated in verse that,

*A bhaber Manush Kotha hote elo*

*Er naiko rosh sadai tosh Mukhe bole satya bol.*

### **Translation**

This holy man came from where

Who does not have wrath but eternal satisfaction

And always speaks the truth.

The followers of *Kartabhoja* cult believe that Aule Chand Fakir forbidden ten activities for his disciples. These are:

*Tin Deho Karmo* (three physical activities):

Not to commit sex with prohibited women;

Not to snatch others property; and

Not to kill others.

*Tin Mono Karmo* (three psychological activities):

Not to wish to commit extra marital sex;

Not to wish to snatch others property; and

Not to wish to kill others.

*Chaar Bakya Karmo* (four verbal activities):

Not to tell a lie;

Not to tell ill words;

Not to speak meaninglessly; and

Not to deliver delirious speech.

### 6.2.2 Sadhanas

Two different approaches dominate the *Sadhana* of *Kartabhoja* cult. First itrend is closely affiliated with cultic code and endorsed by the cultic philosophy. And second trend is traditional *Lokayatik* mystic methods which are more conglomerated with *Buddhist Sahajiya* cult. Intrusion of *Sahajiya Sadhana* in the cultic practice of *Kartabhoja* is clearly visible. Attaining the supreme ecstasy is the prime goal of *Kartabhoja Sadhana*. Therefore, conquering the sexual temptation through love feelings, is the basic essence of their cultic practice. Through their mystic practice, the source of lust and lure turns into love senses. In their cultic practice there is no space for libido and it is mentionable that, without relinquishing the sense of lust and lure no votary can attain due success in their *Sadhana*. This is the reason why a male is expected to achieve the existence of a female form inside him and thus should also think himself a female. This is depicted in a verse of *Kartabhoja* that,

*Meye hijra purush khoja*

*Tabe hobi Kartabhoja.*

#### **Translation**

Female behaves like a eunuch

And male turns into impotent

Only then they deserve to be *Kartabhoja*.’

Attaining this stage by a votary is labeled as *Jento Mora* (Living dead). The followers of the cult try to apply this in their day to day life meaningfully. In cultic *Sadhana* of *Kartabhoja*, the practice of controlling breathing is a very important phenomenon. *Kartabhoja Sadhana* has four tiers. These are *Proborto*, *Sadhak*, *Siddha* and *Niborto*. The followers of *Kartabhoja* follow some special norms and rituals for improving their own self, such as mind purification, recitation of *Bijmontra* and listening to devotional songs. These are the significant rituals for the followers of *Kartabhoja*. Disciples obey their *Guru* with prime emphasis and even consider the *Guru* as God. They believe that they can perceive the Supreme Being through the image of their human *Guru*. *Guru* in *Kartabhoja* is regarded as the *Karta* or Master of the cult. For the followers *Guru* is none but the God himself appeared in a human form.. To the followers of *Kartabhoja*, a true *Guru* should have five virtues i.e attitude of quietness, the attitude of slave, attitude of child and should have very good temperament. He should not express anger, envy, lust and lure. He (*Guru*) should never expect anything from his disciples. He should not be allured by any worldly matter. There should have a reciprocal interaction among the *Guru* and his disciples. Disciples should

have full devotional submission to his *Guru*. He (disciple) should keep confidence that all his miseries and happiness depends on his Gurus, Guru will rescue the disciple from all adversaries.

*Saar kaaro maan Gurur karuna Sindhu charan jugal*

*Maane karo E ghore pathare*

*Sree Guru bine re bhai ke kore nistar*

*Baal budhhi sadhya matra bhebe dekho sei sakal.*

### **Translation**

O mind vest your veneration to *Guru* for his kind mercy

Without kind *Guru*, who will rescue you?

From these mundane adversities

He is the only hope on the earth, ponder on it deeply.

Unlike most of the folk religions of Bengal, involvement of female in religious rituals is not necessary in *Kartabhoja*. The reason is, the basic tenet of the cult is the belief that both male and female forces exist within the human body. Therefore in *Kartabhoja* cult, one needs not to be dependent on female participation to gain success in *Sadhyaan*. They consider the soul of the body as the male and self as female. They try to attain success in their prayer by controlling the instincts which direct the body to go towards wrong path. For this reason, a *Sadhak* of *Kartabhoja* cult does not need any association of a female being even they need not have to seek the help of their wives as well. Thus they believe that, within this body there is the existence of dual being of both male and female. This is why for a *Kartabhoja* follower committing extra marital sex is regarded as adultery.

### **6.2.3 Taboos**

Friday is considered as very holy and important day for the followers of *Kartabhoja*. On this day they restrain from taking meat, fish and any other food containing protein. On Friday the followers of *Kartabhoja* keep fast. In the evening, the followers offer *Swandesh* (dry sweet made of sweet cheese) in the name of Aule Chand. High priest takes a share of the offered food with a breath and the followers than break their fast by taking the offered food without bite of the teeth by standing in the water of *Himsagar* (a sacred pond). In the evening in every house vegetarian foods are served to the family chief. Only in Satima's house fish is allowed to be served. On Friday all the devotees and *Mahasays* assembled together. The gathering starts with the songs offering and different devotional songs. None can leave the gathering place until the assembly comes to an end. In the place of assembly, seeping tea, chewing betel leaf and smoking are

strictly prohibited. No other subject is to be allowed to discuss in the assembly without glorifying Aule Chand. In that particular day the followers should avoid their anger, lure, lust even they should restrain themselves from committing sex with their wives as well. It is also prohibited to keep any other thing in mind except the name of *Karta*.

*Dayik Mojhlis* (Confessional gathering): *Dayik Mojhlis* is another important event of Friday assembly. If any devotee commits any sin, crime or fall in maladies, then that devotee begs mercy of God confessing his guilt before the gathering. After the confession by the devotee *Mahashay* and other fellow devotees pray to Sati Maa for her mercy. Other norms which are obeyed by the followers are to speak the truth, to behave honest, prohibition of killing any animal and committing extra marital sex. These are strictly prohibited. Besides these, to behave wrongfully to any man, to tell ill words and talking without any purpose are also forbidden for the followers of *Kartabhoja*. Moreover, to eat meat and eggs are also forbidden and even if those are from pet animals which produce meat and eggs is also prohibited for the followers of *Kartabhoja*.

#### 6.2.4 Festivals

The followers of *Kartabhoja* celebrate some festivals with very solemn mood and faith. The principal festival of *Kartabhoja* is *Dol Utsob*. Both the *Barati* (disciples) and *Mahashay* (preceptor) attend this festival as the part of their cultic rituals. Through this festival the followers believe that a direct connection between *Barati* and *Mahashay* is established. The history of this festival is unknown but devotees believe that Aule Chand the founder of *Kartabhoja* was the initiator of this festival.

The festival starts on the day of *Sree Panchami*. It begins by offering worship to Fakir Thakur at the dawn. On a stage the devotees put a quilt said to be used by Aule Chand the Fakir Thakur, his wooden sandal and install the statue of Vishnu and the statue of *Radha-Krishna*. *Dol Abir* (Vermilion) mica and attar are offered to all departed souls of *Mahashayas*. Then *Baratis* beg blessings from *Mahashayas* offering *Abir* to their feet. Next day devotional songs are sung by the devotees from dawn to dusk and the devotees pay rent. Foods are then served to the devotees. It is believed in *Kartabhoja* cult that, *Karta* is the owner of this body; therefore disciples have to pay rent for their body to *Karta*. All devotees eat together by overlooking their caste, clan and religious identity. Though the festival ends on the first day of lunar fortnight but its fervor continues till the 5<sup>th</sup> day and on 5<sup>th</sup> day *Pancham dol* is celebrated. On that very special day devotees put the statue of *Radha Krishna* on a cradle and swing the same. After the festival ends



on the full moon the *Baratis* leave the place and return to their home. But *Mahashayas* stay back in the festival ground till the end of the five-day long festival.

*Raath Jatra* is another important festival of *Kartabhoja* community. It is celebrated in the month of *Boishakh* (the first month of Bengali calendar). Though *Kartabhoja* inherited *Raath Jatra* from Hinduism, but in performing the festival the followers do not follow the rituals of Hindu theology. Hindus during *Rathajatra* put the statue of the god *Jagannath* on the top of the *Raath* (Chariot). But *Kartabhoja* followers do not go after this. The festival of *Rathajatra* starts on the very first day of full moon in the month of *Boishakh* and ends on the *Saptami Tithi*. It is said that *Sati Maa* on the instruction of Aule Chand in her dream started this *Raath Jatra*. There is a heresy about this *Raath Jatra*. Myth tells that, when *Sati Maa* introduced this *Raath Jatra*, Raja Krishna Chandra was against it. But *Sati Maa* by denying Raja's prohibition arranged the *Raath Jatra*. Raja made a public announcement that if the *Raath (chariot)* moves forward without any puller, only then he will allow celebrating the festival. *Sati Maa* then placed her seven years old son Dulal Chandra on the *Raath* and the *Raath* started to move forward miraculously by itself without the assistance of any puller. Seeing this event Raja became astonished and at once became a devotee of *Sati Maa* and granted her lot of money, properties and a fine looking *Raath* and honored Dulal Chand as *Dev Mohanto*.

This festival is observed for two days. On the first day in the morning of full moon day, the devotees worship Aule Chand's quilt, wooden sandal of Fakir Thakur, the statue of *Laxmi-Narayan* and the statue of Dulal Chand that has been kept on the *Raath*. Some rituals are followed to place all the offerings by devotees on the *Raath*. Prior to setting the goods on the *Raath* devotees sing devotional songs which is called *Mahajani Sangeet*. At the outset a devotee proceeds with the quilt of Fakir Thakur, then others fellow devotees follow him with the statue of Vishnu and the statue of *Laxmi-Narayan*. Taking out all those statues and quilt of Fakir Thakur from the temple, first they completely round the *Raath* and then set all things on it. After putting all things on the *Raath*, the descendant of *Sati Maa* is to pull the *Raath* first and then all the devotees join him and start pulling it forward to far distance and keep the *Raath* under a Banyan tree for seven days. After a week the *Raath* is taken back to the starting point again.

Besides the above two festivals, *Kartabhoja* followers also celebrate death anniversaries of Nirmala Devi, Gopal Krishna, Kartababa and Satya Charan Paul Dev Mohanto the pioneer Guru of *Kartabhoja* cult. After the particular day of Ram Sharan's death anniversary, followers

celebrate *Faal chhora* ceremony (Throwing fruits). This festival was also introduced by *Sati Maa* as well.

We already have come to know from history of the emergence of the folk religions that all folk religions appeared in Bengal as defiant views against the atrocities of *Brahminical* Hindu religion. The history of the genesis of the *Kartabhoja* cult was also the same. Like other folk religions, the followers of *Kartabhoja* do not believe in supposition. They seek existence of God within human being. Therefore, they do not believe in any sort of caste or class disparity among the followers of *Kartabhoja*. They treat all men equally, irrespective of caste, class, clan, religion. They believe that if human being is regarded as *Devata* irrespective of his class, caste, religion and so on, then love for mankind will increase among human. As a result no communal disparity, no religious bigotry, no caste discrimination could pollute people. They feel the presence of God in every human. They believe God manifest Himself on the earth in human forms. For this reason, they think, if anybody belittles humankind and hate them; he/she must go to hell. This is why; they give more emphasis on offering humanitarian services to mankind in their needs, especially at the time of their miseries and maladies. They believe that the true ecstasy comes more directly through rendering services to humankind rather than that of worshipping God or reciting the *Mantras* of the name of *Karta*.

We have seen that among the devotees of *Kartabhoja Guru* is regarded as God, as the other folk religions also do. The realization that no religion or religious priest have any power to solve the day to day problems of human beings just by uttering *mantras* before an idol which has no life of its own. The followers of these cultic religions of which *Kartabhoja* is one, found the solution in human *Guru*. Followers found that only a human *Guru* can show them the real path of salvation. In him they can rely on and also can share with him about their agonies, miseries and adversaries of life. It is the *Guru* who can help them in getting relief from their miseries of life. Institutional social religions always enforced them to enter in temple, to offer worship to an idol called God but with no result. Human *Guru* being a human by himself has the capacity to guide them about life and living, can give proper advice in their needs. So, the followers believe that anyone who surrender and pay homage to human *Guru* unconditionally, in that case he/she could purify himself or herself and thus become a perfect human being.

The main goal of *Kartabhoja* cult is to synchronize all religious faiths. For this reason, we see the influence of various ritualistic elements in *Kartabhoja Sadhana*. *Kartabhoja* cult by avoiding all kinds of social limitations and religious bigotries tried to adopt good teachings from all

religions. They think a person truly indoctrinated by humanism, only should be regarded as a true human being and should not be identified on the basis .of religion, class, caste, race, color or nationality. They believe in eternal brotherhood of human beings. It is stated in one of *Bhaber Geet* (Devotional song) that,

*Bhaire Maag, Firingi, Olandas, Hindu, Musalman  
Ek bidhatai gorechhen, bostutai ache sob dehe saman,  
Jadi ek Ongashote janmo holo sakal  
Asal nakal boli tabe kare.*

### **Translation**

O my brother, Maag, French, Dutch, Hindu and Muslim  
Everybody has been created by the same God,  
Everybody's body is consist of the same elements  
If all are created from the same source  
Then why do we discriminate from each other.?’

Almost all the followers of *Kartabhoja* community came from the lower stratum of the society. Poverty, illiteracy and superstition are inseparable part of their life. Therefore, Yoga has been introduced in their *Sadhana* for keeping the followers physically and mentally sounds. So it is seen that the principal goal of cultic philosophy of *Kartabhoja* is to *bring* spiritual and social liberty for its followers.

The *Kartabhoja* community in present day is almost on the verge of decline. The *Kartabhoja* religion failed to uphold its primary ideology among its member and day by day its philosophy is decaying and the number of true followers and *Mahashayas* are alarmingly decreasing. These days all *Mahashayas* are busier in earning money rather than that to preach the teaching and preaching of *Sati Maa*. In the past, relation between *Barati* (disciple) and *Mahashaya* (preceptor) was very much reciprocal and respectful, but today the relation between *Barati* and *Mahashaya* is merely of earning and giving rent. If this condition continues further, then in near future this cultic religion will banish forever.

### 6.3 Balahari Cult

We already have discussed that pains and agonies of the lower stratum population, intolerable social oppression on them by the ruling elites ignited the emergence of the cult based folk religious movements of eighteenth century Bengal and the ultimate goal of all these movements was to provide shelter to the down trodden population of the society who were the prey of oppression of the social injustice, customs, norms and religious persecution. This is true for the emergence of *Balahari* cult movement also. Like all other founders and preachers of folk religions, Balaram Hari, the founder of the '*Balahari*' movement, also had to face bitter experience of life as a member of lower caste. In early stage of his life, Balaram Hari was physically assaulted and persecuted by the social elites and the members of the upper class of the society. It is interesting to note that, though the revolt of all folk religions of eighteenth century Bengal was basically tacit in nature but the *Balahari* movement initiated by Balaram Hari was more rebellious in attitude and in its action. Balaram Hari was a member of lower caste Hindu family, who in his early life worked as a watch man in the house of a local Zaminder.

In the year 1780 A.D or in 1781 A.D., Balaram Hari was born in Meherpur, (now a district of Bangladesh) of Nadiya district in undivided India. It could be assumed that the emergence and development of his movement popularly known as *Balahari* community was initiated sometimes in the beginning of nineteenth century. However, the *Balahari* community later was termed in different names like *Balahari Samprodai*, *Hariram Samprodai*, *Balarami*, *Balarambhoja* and *Balaram Chandrer Dharma*.

In his early life, Balaram Hari was employed as a watchman under a local Zamindar. He was physically assaulted by his master accused of stealing gold ornaments from the idol of the family temple. After that incident, Balaram left his village and spent some years in an unknown place. On returning from his hibernation he started preaching his own religious ideas.

Kumudnath Mullick in his book titled *Nadiya Kahini* wrote 'Balaram Hari the founder of *Balahari* cult hundred years ago. He was born in a Hari family (lower caste family) in Malopara village of Meherpur. From very early boy hood he was very honest and good mannered. In his youth, Balahari had been working under local zamindar family known as Mallick family as a watchman in their temple. Ironically one night, gold ornaments of the family idol inside the temple were stolen and Balaram was accused of stealing those ornaments. He was severely tortured by the Zamindar. Being physically assaulted by the Mallick family, Balaram left home for an unknown destination for a long time. In his cynic life he came in contact of Buddhist

yogic votaries and was indoctrinated by them. After a long time ending his cynic life in unknown destination, Balaram returned back to his own village and started preaching a new religion in his own name' (Mullic K.; 2015; p. 240).

Akkshoy Kumar Dutta was the first scholar who attempted to put some light on different folk religions of Bengal with very meticulous and rational mind. He in his famous book titled *Bharatborshiy Upasak Samprodai* wrote in details on *Balahari* cult. He narrated the same story about Balaram Hari, his early life and his cult. He wrote 'Balaram Hari worked as a watchman under the local Zamindar the Mallick family. Mallick family had an idol named *Anandbihari* in their family temple. One day some golden ornaments of the idol were stolen and for that Mallick family accused Balaram Hari for the theft and brought him under punishment accusing negligence in his duty. After that incident wearing brownish colored dress, Balaram left home and chose a cynic life and later on return to his own village, Balram established a cult after his name and preached his new religious ideas' (Dutta, A. K. p. 240).

*Somprokash*, a renowned News Paper of nineteenth century brought out a report on Balaram Hari and his cult after his death, published in 1862. This article carried almost the same story about Balaram Hari and his life as well. But in this report of *Somprakash*, Balaram Hari was mentioned as a very good man and there was no mention of the incident of stealing gold ornaments and punishment given to Balaram Hari by the local Mallick family. It was stated in *Somprokash* that 'Meherpur is very famous as the birth place of Balaram Hari, who founded a new religion known to everybody as the religion of *Balaram Chandrer Dharma* (religion of Balaram Chandra). Balaram Hari had good numbers disciples in Bardhaman, Kolkata, Nadiya, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur. Around 5/6 years back he took his last breath. Balaram was a very humble man. He lived his life working as a watchman. For an unknown reason he took a journey to unknown destination. After the end of his cynic life in unknown place he started preaching a new religion for his community' (Karim A.;2012; p. 56-57).

Jogendranath, another famous writer in his book *Hindu castes and Sects* carried the same story like that of Kumudnath Mallick and Akkshoy Kumar Dutta. He wrote 'Balahari in his youth, was employed as a watchman in local family of Zaminder, and was very cruelly treated for alleged negligence of his duty. After being physically assaulted by the Zamindar Balram left his village. Wandering here and there for some years, he set himself up as a religious preacher and could attract around him more than twenty thousand disciples.' (Chakraborti. S. 2003; 56).

Promothnath. in his book titled *Hindu Civilization during British rule, vol-1* specifically stated that the founder of the *Balahari* sect Balaram Hari (a very low caste Hindu) was an inhabitant of the village Meherpur in the district of Nadiya..... He died in A.D. 1850, when he was sixty-five years of age. He was evidently a man of great natural talents, and gradually succeeded in gathering round him a few thousand disciples who considered him as an incarnation of Vishnu. Balram Hari died in 1850 at the age of sixty-five years. If we take this statement as true, then Balaram's date of birth should be in 1785 instead of 1780(Karim, A.; *ibid*; p. 58).

However, it can be summed up that, Balahari was born in Malopara village in Meherpur, and established a dwelling on the bank of river *Bhairab*. In this place he initially founded his cult. Within a very short span of time, his ideology and philosophy attracted large number of people in vast areas of Bengal. For accommodating increasing number of disciples, Balaram transferred his dwelling to *Nischintopur* with the collaboration Tanu, one of his principal disciples. Tanu later on took the custody of this hermitage after the death of Balaram Hari. Under the charismatic leadership of Balaram Hari *Balahari* cult got unbelievable popularity among down trodden population of the society. As a result, within a very short time more *Akhara* were established for the followers of Balahari cult in different parts of Bengal such as in *Purulia, Panchakol, Saheb Nagar*.

Balaram Hari was a gifted personality and was also an eloquent speaker. None could win over him in debate. He defeated all his rivals and enemies by his logical irrefutable sermons. Mention may be made of some instances where Balaram Hari manifested his logical eloquence. One day when Balaram was taking bath in the river, he saw some Brahmins were throwing water in memorial of the departed souls of their forefathers. Balaram Hari started doing the same act like the bathing Brahmins. Noticing Balaram's activities, one of the Brahmins who asked him why Balaram was doing the same act as the Brahmins were doing. Balaram answered that he was irrigating in a vegetable field. Astonished by the answer of Balaram the Brahmin asked him, "where is the vegetable field"? Balaram again said to the Brahmin that if their throwing of water could reach to the heaven from this river, why his throwing of water would not reach to the vegetable field far apart from that place? (Dutta. A. *ibid*; p.240). In this way Balaram Hari conquered the heart of the people. His speeches had mesmerizing effects on the mass people.

All the followers of *Balahari* cult believe that Balaram Hari is the incarnation of Rama in this modern age. It is interesting to note that in all other folk religions of Bengal that emerged in the eighteenth century, Chaitanya Dev the founder and spiritual leader of Gaudiyan Vaisnavism

played an important part in their philosophical orientation. Followers of those folk religions believed that their founder was none but the true incarnation of Sree Chaitanya and there had been more or less philosophical influence of *Goudio Vaisnavism* in their cultic philosophy. But, contrary to this, in *Balahari* cult, the founder Balaram Hari is considered as the Supreme Being and the followers also believe that Sree Chaitanya himself was keen to get the blessing of Balaram Hari, the founder of the cult. In one of the communal composition of *Balahari* cult it is depicted:

*Dekho Kolite Gour Hari*

*Taar dui nayane boi je bari*

*Hari Raamer Charan nehar kori*

*Kende gelo Nabadweepe.*

### **Translation**

O my mind, ponder on it

In modern age the Gour Hari

Fell tears continuously in *Nabadweep*

for getting the blessings of Hari Raam.

Not only that the followers of *Balahari* cult believed Balaram Hari as the creator of this universe and for this reason Vishnu, Shiva and Chaitanya all the deities aspire to get the blessings of Balaram Hari. This is manifested in one of the verses of *Balahari* community where it is stated that,

*Hariram tatta nigure tatta Vedanta chhara.*

*Kore sob dharma poritayajyo sei peyechhe dhora.*

*Oi tatta jene Shiva shwasthanbasi*

*Sit tatta jene Shachir Gora Nimai Sanyasi.*

### **Translation**

The knowledge of Hariram is esoteric- beyond Vedanta knowledge

Only he could conceive it who could avoid all religions

Shiva conceiving this knowledge took shelter in cremation-ground

And Nimai, the son of Shachi became cynic.

It is interesting to note that all the folk religions crept up the doctrine of the incarnation or advent theory, in which the Supreme Being is acknowledged as the source of all power. But *Balahari* cult declared Balaram Hari as the source of all power. Followers of the cult believe

that, all other gods always were aspired to get the blessings of Balaram Hari and even the God Shiva and Chaitanya Dev were also very eager for getting the blessings of Balaram Hari. Followers of the Balhari cult also believe that the knowledge of Balaram Hari is superior to the Vedanta knowledge as well. It is noticeable that in *Balahari* cult Hariram replaced all the gods and goddess and social leaders and there is a conscious tendency to ignore scripture based knowledge too. It is surprisingly very advanced and bold utterance against traditional religions and scriptures based knowledge indeed. Akkshoy Kumar Dutta wrote that ‘though the followers of Balaram believed him as Sree Ram Chandra himself, but Balaram himself never claimed the same’. It is said that Balaram Hari thought himself as the Supreme authority. He declared himself as the creator of this world and it was mandatory for the followers of the cult that Balaram was the cause of creation, permanence and destruction as well as in course of time he would destroy it. One day when some of his disciples asked him from where does this earth appeared? In answer Balaram Hari replied, “this earth came into being from *Khayo* (erosion)”. The disciples asked again how this earth came into being from *Khayo* (erosion)? He replied “at the very beginning there was nothing. I, myself, have created this earth from the erosion (*khayo*) of my own body. And for this reason, this earth is named as *Khiti* (earth). *Khayo*, (erosion) *Khiti* (earth) and *Khetro* (land) all these three terms carry the same meaning. People know me as the Hari (the lower caste). But I am Hari not because of I was born in lower caste. But because, as a man who built house is spelled as *Gharami* (a person who is builder of huts by profession) similarly I am Hari because I have created *Haar* (bones). (Shet, Soma; 2007; p.49).

From our foregoing discussions it can be concluded that like other folk religious movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, Balahari cult was also a defiant movement against Vedanta philosophy. Balaram Hari, at initial phase of his assertion as the Supreme Being, was once assaulted by the local social and religious leaders for challenging the established social and religious norms, rituals and authority of his time. In spite of the fact that *Harirami* community declared Hariram as the supreme being, but what really is remarkable and noteworthy here is that, followers of Balahari cult upheld the supremacy or highness of human being above all gods and goddesses, religions and scriptures. In particular the Balahari cult gave all efforts to establish the dignity and rights of the people from lower stratum of the society who for long did not have the minimum rights to survive as human beings. Balahari cult movement challenged the supremacy of the so called upper class and traditional social and religious doctrines. Followers of Balaram Hari



believe that their leader is not an incarnation of Rama rather he is none but Rama himself. The followers consider that Rama, re-appeared in the earth as Balaram Hari. It is stated in a verse:

*Ramadin tumi nityo purush Brahmander pati*

*Toma bhinno jiber naiko onno goti*

*Sreestir koro sthiti o he pita poti.*

### **Translation**

Ramadin you are the eternal Lord of the universe

None but you are the real survivor of all creatures

You have created all as father and husband simultaneously.

In the above verse, an obscure creation theory of Balahari cult has been manifested very significantly. In this creation theory it can be observed that, the followers of Balaram Hari considered him as the creator of this universe. The myth states that at first Balaram Hari created Hoimaboti, the mother of universe from his yearn and blessed her with his eternal power. Hoimobatai extended her help and support to Balaram Hari to complete his creation. This is why in Balahari cult woman is treated with esteem, honor and dignity and great veneration. Women are considered as the source of primordial power as well. In the above mentioned verse, Hariram is portrayed as father because he created this universe and Hoimabati who acted as Balahari's aide in creation, is deemed as the mother. At the same time Hariram is regarded as husband as well. The followers of Balahari community believe that every woman has the primordial power like Hoimabati and for this reason they show special honor to women. As part of their belief, every woman therefore is to be respected as an individual with due honor. For them, woman should not be considered as mere an object for sexual gratification only, but should be treated as a dignified social being. Eventually unlike traditional religions and the Indian social customs, the followers of Balahari cult treat women with honor and dignity and put them in equal position with that of male members of the society.

### **6.3.1 Sadhana**

Compared to all other folk religions of Bengal, the nature and philosophical outlook of Balahari cult is quite different. It is more materialistic and realistic in nature and in practice. For this reason, it has no esoteric austerity for gaining due mystic success to get salvation and freedom from this life; rather they prefer to reincarnate as a human being in this earth which is just opposite to the philosophy of other folk religions. This is why; its *Sadhana* is quite realistic in nature. It is mentionable that for the followers of *Balahari* cult, attaining eternal bliss should not

be the ultimate goal of *Sadhana* or *prayer* for any individual, rather *Sadhana* should be the medium of attaining the quality of becoming a perfect human being. This attitude towards life is clearly different from the other cultic *Sadhana*. Balaram Hari initiated this cult movement based on his personal experience of life for emancipating human beings particularly people of the lower stratum from all social disgrace. Ironically in course of time, even in this cult some esoteric *Sadhanas* were adapted through which the followers looked for achieving ultimate goals of rebirth in human race. The *Sadhanas* of *Balahari* cult have four tiers. These are *Khastan*, *Bodhtan*, *Eyotan*, and *Nityan*. (Chakroborti. S. *ibid*; p. 153). Each of these has separate and significant essence and ritualistic meaning. Soma Sheth in explaining the tiers mentioned that the *Khastan* as the first stage of *Sadhana*, but in contrary, Sudhir Chokrabarti mentioned *Khastan* as the last stage of *Sadhana* of *Balahari* cult. (*ibid*; p. 58).

#### 6.3.1.1 *Khastan*

*Khastan* is the very first stage of *Sadhana* in *Balahari* community. In this stage the followers think themselves as the subject of Lord and try to build a relationship with Supreme. But, according to Sudhir Chakrobarti, it is the last stage of *Sadhana* of *Balahari* cult. Whatsoever, in this stage the human being as a family man usually remain engaged in building bondage with their day to day affairs. But the ultimate goal of a disciple of Balaram Hari should be to achieve liberation from this day to day bondage so that the followers could unite with the Supreme being. The followers offer their prayer to Hariram for the salvation from this mundane bondage.

#### 6.3.1.2 *Eyotan*

For a family man in the *Balahari* community, *Eyotan* is the most important stage of *Sadhana*. Most of the followers of *Balahari* community remain eager to practice in this stage for their liberty. This stage, in practice is actually a well planning schemata for upgrading life style and sexual life of the followers of *Balahari* community. This is the main ritualistic part of the *Balahari* cult. The main target of this *Sadhana* in this stage is birth control.

The poorer segment in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, was devoid of any sort of entertainment in life, neither had the the affordability for such. As a result sexual act was the only source of entertainment for most of the rural people in Bengal. This was the principal reason for population explosion and eventually caused poverty among those destitute people. It should be noted here that, at that time no program for birth control or planned parent hood was available. Therefore, for controlling excessive child birth among the followers of *Balahari* community, who were

mostly illiterate and extremely poor, Balaram Hari introduced a ritual for his followers by restricting sex frequently. According to Balaram's sermon, a follower is permitted to do sex only for reproduction of child rather than for enjoyment. . This is why, ejaculation without the purpose of reproduction is considered among the followers of *Balahari* community as a great sin. In fact, the followers of *Balahari* are advised to restrain from doing sex under the cover of certain rituals and beliefs. And for this reason, they have a secret and queer belief that, if anybody go fori sexual act in order to get a child in the first phase of night, it could produce a child who might become a thief or a hooligan in later life. Child who is born due to sexual act committed before midnight, might become dacoit or robber after grown up. As such only safe time to have sex with wife is after midnight. If a child is born, out of such sexual cat after miud night then the child would become a holy and noble person. The best time to have sex for having a child is at dawn and if any child is born due to sexual act at that particular time, that child will be the best one. Though apparently the whole thing may seem weired but in depth it these srmons regarding the timing of doing sex contain a very thoughtful, intelligent thinking for controlling birth of an excessive children for the followers of Balahari cult. It could be termed as an indirect birth control suggestion for the rural illiterate people. Generally in rural areas men go to bed early in the night and fall asleep. If they follow this ritual then the ratio of having sex obviously will reduce. As a result conceiving of child also will reduces and consequently number of child birth ultimately will come down. Thus, having sex without the target of reproduction is considered as a sin by the Balahari cult members. The followers of the cult are advised to have sex on the fourth day of menstruation of a woman which is termed as the theory of *Sare tiner tatta* (theory of three and half). According to their belief, having sex on the fourth day of menstruation increases the probability of getting pregnant by the women. They believe after three and half days of menstruation period, the color of menstrual blood turns yellow and the time when this yellow colored menstrual blood flows is more propitious time for conceiving child in the womb. Therefore, it is advised to the followers of *Balahari* community to have sex on that particular time only with the desire of having children and furthermore, they are also advised not to go for sexual intercourse during rest of the days of the month. This is why; a queer norm is observable among the followers of *Balahari* cult that is to have sex once in a month.

### 6.3.1.3 Nityon

Nityon is the third stage of *Balahari Sadhana*. At this stage the followers of Balhari cult unfstened their interest in sexual acts. They realize that meaningless loss of semen means parting oneself from the God. The followers at the same time also become apathetic towards family life. In this particular phase of *Sadhana*, the followers become more involved in constant meditation by uttering the name of Hariram and keep themselves aloof from all kinds of lure and lust. In most instances it becomes difficult for a follower, who is a family person, to give full devotion in Hariram. The reason is, during this stage, the devotees have to do the meditation in a jungle or in a solitary place far from locality and has to leave behind all the family bondages. This becomes really difficult for most of the devotees. If any person could reach the desired destination by avoiding all the earthly bondages, only then the devotee is promoted to the rank of *Sarker*, the highest level of devotional achievement in Balahari cult. Achieveing the satus of a Sarkar gives the devotee the powere to give Mantras to his fellow community people.

### 6.3.1.4 Bodhitan

*Bodhitan* is considered as very primary stage of *Sadhana* for a member of *Balahari* community. It is totally reverse to *Khastan* where a devotee is considered to be ignorant of all rules and rituals. But in *Bodhitan* stage a devotee has to compensate for his ignorance, unsuccessful ejaculation and producing many children. It is depicted in one of the verses by Gostha Das where he says,

*Akhere ei baar bhoktibhabe dako taare*

*Jadi Bodhitane hobi uddhar*

*Naile upai naiko aar.*

*Bodhitane thakle pore*

*Porbire chaar juger phyare*

*Dekho bichare*

*Ar Bodhitane bondho hoye theko nako maan amar.*

#### **Translation**

If you want to surpass the *Bodhitan*

O my mind, first of all, recall his name with due devotion.

Without his mercy there is no way to be successful in austerity.

If you become confined to the *Bodhitan*

You must fall in the rebirth cycle

Ponder on it, O my mind

Do not engage yourself into the cage of *Bodhitan*, no more.

Unlike all other folk religions of Bengal *Balahari* cult is a religion of social affiliation and of family bondage. Therefore, in this cultic ideology, cynicism is hardly allowed. However, it could be noticed that, most of the followers of this cult perform their religious rituals staying within family life. It is worth mentioning that, most of the followers of *Balahari* cult come from the very grass root level lower stratum illiterate population of the society. Obviously they are unconscious segment of the population who do not have free access to any opportunities for their social and psychological needs. They are mainly accustomed with a very clumsy and monotonous life style. As a consequence, only pleasure for them is to have frequent sex. This is their only way of entertainment. This is the reason why, to control the unrestrained sexual acts, *Balahari* cult ritual emphasized on *Bodhitan*, or the captivated life cycle. This is why, all the followers of *Balahari* community pray for liberty from this *Bodhitan* stage of life through their worship and austerity.

In *Bodhitan* stage the followers continuously recite the name of Hariram, which is the principal prayer of *Balahari* cult. Besides this, they perform bathing of a wooden Kharam (sandal) of Hariram every day. Prior to the bathing, they cover the Kharam with pure butter oil. At noon pure food is offered to the house of Hariram. At evening the followers chant the name of Hariram by lighting a lamp as the part of the ritual. By reciting Hariram's name, the followers try to feel the existence of Hariram within their own body and in their conscience as well. They believe that without conceiving Hariram in entirety within their heart and soul, all worships and prayers will go in vain. If anybody, according to their cultic belief, gets the blessings of Hariarm, then the blessed person no more shall have to bother about any sorts of zealous or envious acts. For this reason the followers of *Balahari* cult avoid all traditional religious ritualism and religious scriptures which not only impede social harmony, but also increase discrimination between man and man which is the main barrier to have the blessings of God. It is said in a verse that,

*Adhor maanush dharba jadi*

*Aage chharo boidik bidhi*

*Tabe milbe raatno nidhi.*

### **Translation**

If you want to get unions with the invisible being

First of all, leave your ritualistic religion and its scriptures

Only then, you may get his blessings.

The followers of *Balahari* cult do not present their offerings with usual things to their worshipped one, but they simply establish Hariram in their heart and they casually offer prayers to Balaram Hari inside themselves. They chant the name of Hariram and believe that this makes their body holy and enlightened. According to their cultic language it is called *Dehotatta Sadhan* (body mystic Sadhana). Followers offer all their prayers and worships to Hariram through offering devotional songs.

*Balahari* cult performs some significant religious rituals. The followers of this cult believe that in a human body both male and female forms exist side by side. Followers believe that the male form in the human body is positioned on the right side of the body and similarly the position of the female form is on the left side of the body. The followers of the *Balahari* community also believe that, this human body is constituted of the eight elements of which four come from the father and the rest four are inherited from mother. Of these four elements such as blood, skin, hair and flesh are inherited from mother and bone, fat, semen and brain are inherited from father's extract. According to Balhari cult, human being inherits the eight elements from their parent but there are ten more elements and those are given by God. Altogether a human being is made of eighteen elements that give finest shape to the human body. These eighteen elements in folk cultic language are mentioned as the eighteen chambers where eighteen divine beings reside and execute their function to run the body well. It is interesting to note that in other folk religions too mention of eighteen elements in a human body could also be noticed. Followers of *Balahari* cult believe that, Hariram their Supreme Lord, contain in himself the core essence of both male and female beings. At the same time he is treated as the creator of the universe. It means Balaram Hari is worshipped as the almighty God, by his followers and thus all eighteen elements by which a human body is constituted are nothing but precious gifts of Balahari to human beings. Devotees also believe that Balahari sits on the fat, one of the most significant ingredients of the boy. This means Balaram resides within human body and therefore, one need not have look for Hariram outside one's own body rather one should seek him within one's own body for getting Hariram's blessings to remain well. We noticed earlier that to explain this esoteric body mystic philosophy, the followers of cultic folk religions sometimes took the help of symbolic language to hide their inner philosophical essence from the attack of mainstream religions. The reason was, in most instances the philosophical essence of these cultic religions was basically composed of defiant ideas contradicting the ruling philosophy of the mainstream religions of the society.

According to belief of the major cultic religions, there are three major rivers (veins) run through the body and everything of the body is controlled by these three rivers (veins). These three rivers or veins are in cultic language, are known as *Ida*, *Pingola*, and *Sushanma*. A devotee can get the blessings of God if he could attain control over these three rivers it would help in getting rid of all mundane desires, lust and lure that passes through these veins and try to contaminate the other bodily instincts and directs the human being towards evil path. It is said in verse that,

*Thamer bhitar tean taar ache*

*Karigaar khbar nichchhe taar.*

### **Translation**

Three strings are there in the pillar

The creator is caring of them.

The followers of *Balahari* cult consider sexual feeling of a woman as *Matridhan* (capital of mother) and semen as *Pitridhan* (capital of father)(not clear... ). *Matridhan* always wants to devour *Pitridhan*. Therefore, a devotee has to earn the capability of overcoming the feeling of libido (*Matridhan*) or to learn how to gain control over the art of pumping up the semen upward. This in cultic language is called as *Ulta Sadhana* (reverse method) and is practiced for preserving the *Pitridhan* (semen). The followers believe this act eventually results into retention of semen within the body of a male. For the *Balahari* devotees *Pitridhan* (semen) is the core essence of the body and that is an asset gifted by the Supreme Being and He will take every account of this asset in the day of final judgment. So, if any *Sadhak* loses his *Pitridhan* he has to suffer and will have re birth with miserable life on earth. The devotees mourn if they fail to preserve *Pitridhan* (semen) by accident. Their mourning for losing semen is depicted in one of their cultic verse, where it is stated that,

*Korte geli sadhusango*

*Se sango tui bhango dili*

*Apan Matridhane lubdho hoye*

*Pitridhan saab khoyaili.*

### **Translation**

You wish to be united with the holy man

But eventually you deviated from that right path

You just being indulged into *Matridhan* (lust and lure)

Squander away all of your *Pitridhan* (semen).

In the above verse the significance of preserving *Pitridhan* (semen) is described. In all folk religions, semen is considered as the core essence of life. Also as has already been stated earlier, the followers of all these cultic religions, to some extent, treat semen as the core capital of human life gifted by Supreme Being. In all the folk religions a special method is practiced by the devotees to keep control over ejaculation during intercourse. Therefore, in every folk religion, sex-yogic *Sadhana* plays a vital role in cultic ritual.

Earlier the followers of *Balahari* sect offering prayers and worshipping any idol or any other inanimate object were prohibited. They used to pay homage to Hariram only as their supreme being. Another characteristic of *Balahari* cult is that unlike most of other folk religions, it does not follow succession of *Gurus*. They believe in one Guru that is Balaram Hari and no other Guru succeeded *Balahari* by taking over the charge of the cult after his demise. At the initial phase worshipping of the cult was limited to recitation of the name of their guru "Hariram". and excepting this they had no other idol in their place of prayer to worship, Recitation of Hariram continuously gives the followers a feeling of Balaram Hari's existence as lord within the bodies of the devotees. Ironically these days idolatry has been introduced among the followers of the cult and they now offer homage to an idol of *Balahari*. Jogendranath meaningfully wrote, "During the 'Dol' (or *Holi*) festival, Balaram Hari is worshipped by his disciples. They (*Balaramis*) ridicule idolatry, and recognized no distinction of caste. But that did not continue long time. On the death of Balaram, his widow, a woman of exemplary character and great intelligence, succeeded to the leadership of this sect. Like other folk religions of Bengal since her death, there had been feuds among the followers in the sect for the leadership of the cult. (Chakraborti. S. *ibid*; p.153).

### **6.3.2 Taboo**

Like other major religions and folk religions, *Balahari* community also has some taboos to follow. Such as bathing in the water of *Gangees* for purification and touching one's feet to show homage, are considered as taboos in the cult. As per core lesson of the cult, every human body is the holy place and Hariram resides inside. For this reason when someone touches someone's feet for paying homage that is considered as undermining Hariram. Because he who pays homage to someone by touching the feet and he who takes homage, both actually represent Hariram because in both of them Hariram exists. Therefore, according to *Balahari*'s belief, all are equal and since all are equal then if anybody touches someone's feet he disgraces himself as well as Hariram also. According to their cultic belief, one can reach at desired goal by conceiving the



spirit of Hariram inside one's soul and this is the only through which a person can unite with God. If someone succeeds in performing the same, the particular devotee becomes enlightened both in body and mind. This is the reason one should not to pay homage show respect by touching feet and this ritual is prohibited in *Balahari* cult.

The core doctrines of *Balahari* cult are to love all creatures irrespective of class, creed, and color and not to be envious of others. Killing animals is strictly prohibited among them. Even the followers of *Balahari* community, is prohibited from running any shop for selling meat and fish. If any follower has such a business, or get involved in professions of selling fish or meat, according to their cultic norms, they have to quite that profession and wind up their business. Consuming meat, fish, eggs are totally prohibited for the cult members. But some exception is there. If any devotee, at initial stage of his apprenticeship fails to follow this norm or if anybody hankers after eating these prohibited items, he or she could be allowed to eat those foods for a brief time only. But gradually he/she has to accommodate norms and customs of the cult by giving up the habit. Nobody is to be allowed to enter in temple for offering prayer after eating p foods containing protein. At initial stage if a devotee who yet could not give up the habit of eating protein but wants to enter the temple for prayer, he/she should have a shower to purify him/herself before entering the temple.

The cult members also follow certain taboos in case of offering foods to Hariram as well. For example, followers can offer *Khichuri* (Cooked rice and letil together) and Payesh (a kind of food made of rice, milk and sugar) is Hariram in his temple. Usually Payesh is cooked with milk, but the offered Payesh to Hariram should have to be cooked without milk, because, according to the belief of *Balahari* cult, milk is left over food. The logic is milk is collected after the calf sucks milk from its mother, and for the same reason sweet made of milk is also prohibited to offer to Hariram.

### 6.3.3 Festivals

Festivals are the part of every religion whether major or folk. Festivals play a very important part in religious rituals. *Balahari* community celebrates four festivals in a year such as: *Jaistha Masher Sangkranti*, *Kartic Masher Ekadashi*, *Chaitra Masher Aam Baruni* and 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month *Maagh*. In *Nischintapur* on 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month of *Magh*, the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Bengali calendar, all people of the village assemble and share their food prepared with rice, dal and fruits from the same bawl. However, it is worth mentioning that the participants of this festival not necessarily are the followers of *Balahari* cult, but they celebrated this festival as a universal

festival for everyone. In that particular day, women of the village offer their *Chaluni* (utensil for separating smaller particles, dust or wastes from a loose substance) to wood apple tree on the *Sashtipuja* with *Muri* (puffed rice), and *Patali gur* (rectangular solid tablet of prepared from date palm juice). The wood apple tree is wrapped up with a saree and Dhoti. Among *Balahari* community it is believed that, wood apple tree is a symbol of the primordial power and wood apple is the symbol of breast of woman. This is the reason; they decorate the wood apple tree with saree symbolically considering it as mother. Since, *Balahari* is considered as the manifestation of the primordial power, therefore, they wrapped the wood apple tree with saree and dhoti simultaneously considering wood apple tree as the representative of *Balahari*.

The three day long grand gala festival of the *Balahari* community is *Baruni* held on the day of *Ekadashi* (the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight) of the month of Kartik (the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Bengali calendar). The celebration starts with the offering of shower to the wooden sandal of *Balahari* by the *Sarkar*. Next to *Baruni* is *Dol* festival in which all the members of the community throw *Abir* (a kind of perfumed red powder which is usually thrown by the Hindus to each other during their *Holi* festival) on the wooden sandal of *Hariram*. On this particular day they consume *Chira* (pressed rice). All the participants take offerings of *Chira* by throwing *Abir* to wooden sandal of *Hariram*. Those who fast, they only eat *Batasa* (a kind of sweet made of sugar or molasses) and the water with which the wooden sandal of *Hariram* is washed. The very next day is *Dwadashi* (the twelve day of lunar fortnight) at noon food is offered and in the evening *Chira* is offered as well. On the next day is *Troyodashi* (13<sup>th</sup> day of lunar fortnight) at noon fruits along with *Chira* and other items are offered and in evening, *Luchi* (a kind of soft, thin fine saucer-shaped bread fried in ghee), *Suji* (semolina), *Laddu* (roll sweetmeat), dal(lentil soup) and *Payesh* (a sort of food made of rice, milk and sugar) are offered as well. All devotees sung cultic songs composed by praising *Balahari* continuously for three days. On the last day of the festival followers walk round the temple of *Hariram* three times. In the evening the followers as a ritual put dust taken from the compound of *Hariram* on their whole body. In that particular night all the devotees remain awakened and lit clay lamps and *Dhup*. The next morning all the devotees leave the festival for home with the blessings of the *Sarkar*.

In early times, this festival used to be held in Meherpur with due fervor and dignity. But in course of time, festival in Meherpur lost its glory. Dinendra Kumar Roy described on such a festival at Meherpur in 1910. He wrote at the end of the year during *Baruni* a grand festival was celebrated in the hermitage of *Balahari*. All devotees sang a song composed in praising *Balahari*

along with *Mridonga* (a kind of drum resembling a tom-tom) and other musical instruments. The festival continued for three long days. On the very first day of the festival the devotees offered rice, on the second day their offering was *Chira* and on the third day the festival ended with the offering of *Luchi*. (ibid; p. 58).

#### 6.3.4 Myth

In Balahari cult like other folk religions also has certain myths of its own. One of such myth is about the birth of Balaram Hari the founder of the cult. The myth narrates that Hariram was born in lower class Hajra family in Meherpur. Hajra had six sons. When last and youngest son of Hajra family got married, one day an astrologer predicted that Hajra family would face difficulties from the child of the youngest wife. From that ominous anticipation by the astrologer, everybody in the family became hostile towards the youngest wife and started avoiding her. In the meantime, youngest wife of Hajra family became pregnant. She became very sacred and always tried her utmost to hide her pregnancy from the sight of other members of the family. She used to shed tears for her upcoming misfortune and wished to get rid of her pregnancy. One day, a strange incident occurred. When the youngest wife was cleaning the yard of her house with a broom, all on a sudden a doll like beautiful little baby boy with beard appeared before her and the youngest wife felt a blow inside her womb and gave birth a baby. The perplexed wife, stared at that boy with fear for a moment, and thereafter, she wrapped the boy with a quilt so that none could see the baby and threw the boy in jungle besides the river. Incidentally, the boy was rescued by the elder sister of the mother of that baby. This lady was employed as a maid servant in the house of the local Zaminder of Patkebari. It is said that Hariram himself came in her dream and asked her to pick him up from the jungle. Accordingly she came to the jungle and rescued Hariram. While returning home she was escorted by two tigers. Balaram Hari stayed with his aunt in the Patkelbari Zamindar house till he was eight years old. Later on Balaram came to Meherpur along with his aunt where she was employed as a maid servant in the house of a lawyer named Jiban Ukil. Jiban Ukil the employer of his aunt also employed Balaram to look after the flock of cows that he owned. One day the family Guru (preceptor) of Jiban Ukil visited the house of Jiban Ukil and the house master ordered Balaram to take his Gurudeva to the river Bhairab for bathing. Balaram did so. In the river Ghat, an incident occurred in front of the Gurudev. Balaram started debating with some Brahmins who were bathing in the river and were throwing water to the departed soul of their forefathers. Balaram started doing the same act as

the Brahmins were doing. The Brahmins observing this asked Balaram as why did he was doing so? Balaram answered “for watering the vegetable field”. At one point, the Brahmins asked Balaram to show them how Balaram could send water to his vegetable field which was far away from the river. Balaram by the grace of his Guru started fetching water from the river and through air he started irrigating the vegetable field. Family Guru of Jiban Ukil, after bathing came back from the river and told Jiban Ukil about the incident and termed Balaram as a great holy man, a great Yogi. After hearing the story, Jiban Ukil released Balaram from his service with due honor. But homeless Balaram had no shelter to go. He then asked his aunt to take him to the jungle from where she rescued him. Balaram’s aunt at his request took Balaram to the jungle from where she rescued him. In that jungle Balaram set up a prayer place that later became famous as Balaram Chandrer Akhra. The place in which Balaram established his *Akhra* belonged to his master Jiban Ukil. Jibal Ukil gifted the land to Balaram. (ibid. p. 66) which is also narrated earlier.

Another myth is popular among the followers of the cult that manifests the extra ordinary mystic power of Balahari. It is very popular myth among the followers of Balahari. The myth says that Hariram at one stage of his life dwelled in *Nischintapur*. During that period he established an Akhra at *Nischintapur*. *Nischintapur* was under the Zamindery of Kanai Babu and he had a warehouse in *Nischintapur*. This man was a person of irritating character and was very envious of Balaram’s popularity. Many *Rayots* in his zamindari attracted by the charismatic personality of Blaram became disciple of him .This made the Zaminder envious of Balaram. One day, when Balaram went to the river Jalangi for taking a bath, the goons of the Zaminder set fire on the Akhra that Balaram built. After the incident Balaram left this village and reached Meherpur just in three steps only. It is said that his first step was in *Nischintapur*, second in *Chapagarar* Math (field of Chapagara) and third one in Meherpur. When, Balaram reached Meherpur, a heavy shower was pouring down on the warehouse of Kanai Babu, the local Zaminder. This nine-day long incessant rain caused a crack around the warehouse and at one stage the whole area along with warehouse collapsed and turned into a big ditch which is still known as *Golaberer Daho*.

### 6.3.5 Mantras

Cultic beliefs are more materialistic and realistic in character. But, at the same time, it should be kept in mind that it is difficult to motivate the marginal, illiterate and superstitious people only by the rational and materialistic thinking. The very down trodden people of the society for long had been deprived from social and religious right. This resulted in spontaneous revolts against

social injustice and traditional social religions by the subaltern population. At the same time these deprived people also wanted their spiritual liberty as well. That is why the preacher of the folk religions had to compromise with the spiritual demand of their followers. Logically speaking this is how the folk religions in spite of being realistic and materialist in nature had to adopt some mantras in its teaching and preaching. In this context, we may mention that, though in folk religions use of some mantras could be observed, but all those are basically magical spells, easy to understand and spelled out in very easy communicable language. It was thus easy for the illiterate down trodden followers of cult religions to understand the language easily. Like other folk religions of Bengal, in *Balahari* community, we could also notice the use of mantras. Such as:

*Hariram Hariram*

*Swayang Ram Chandra purna Brahma sanatan.*

*Sitapathi Hanumanke jeman kore korilen utpatti*

*Temani nijgune kripadane*

*A odhamer proti koro gaati.*

*Tumi amar pita mata tumi amar pati*

*Sree charane kori ei minati*

*Joi Hariram joi. 3 bar*

### **Translation**

Hariram Hariram

You are Ram Chandra and the creator of this universe.

You please take pity on a humble creature like me

As you were kind upon Hanuman being Rama.

You alone my father, mother and lord

I pay my homage to your beautiful legs

Hail the victory of Hariram. (recite 3 times).

2) *Bije kole eksthane utpotti amar*

*Hariram Chandra sei bol Shakti.*

*Ihat tatta janen je byakti*

*Tahar charane amar koti koti pronate.*

*Jini jaha bolen Balaramer boler bole.*

## Translation

I am created from the semen  
But Hariram is the root of all strength  
He, who knows that secret knowledge,  
I bow to him  
Every talks, and moves with the energy of Hariram.  
3) *Hariram Chandrer paye phul jaal dilam*  
*Dharatale dhanya holam.*  
*Rup jouban nayon maan orpon korilam.*  
*Ami durbal durbaler e bol tumi*  
*Sakal janen ontorjami.*  
*Sudhu tomari guun gaai*  
*Shuno anyo kahaer na jani.*

## Translation

I offer my prayer to graceful feet of Hariram  
And for that I became praiseworthy on the earth.  
I surrender my beauty, youth, mind everything to him  
I am very weak and humble and you are the hope of me  
You know everything my lord  
I only recite your name  
I do not bother for another else but you.  
4) *Haaq Hariram Chandra charan dhoyaibo*  
*Charanmrito paan koribo*  
*Jatkinchit gaaye makhibo.*  
*Obshistho jaha thakibe taha sei patre rakhibo tule.*  
*Klyo khaibo.*  
*Guru charanmrito phele deoya boro dosh.*  
*Sabdhan, 3 bar.*

## Translation

Hariram is the truth; I wash the beautiful feet of Hariram  
And will drink the washed out water  
And I besmear that water with my body.  
I will preserve carefully the rest water  
For drinking in the next day.  
It is very hard sin to throw the water  
by which *Guru's* feet was washed out. (recite 3 times).

5) *Haar haddi moni magaje*  
*Gosto posto aargore taali*  
*Ei atharo mokam chhepe acchen*  
*Aamar Balaram Hari.*  
*Sakal anyo ek bhabiya biswas koribe*  
*Hariram chandrer nigure tatta.*  
*Kichhu janite paribe*  
*Naam Brahma satyo. 3 baar.*

**Translation**

Bones, fat, semen and brain  
Flesh, hair, blood and skin  
My beloved Hariram mixes with these eighteen chambers.  
Those who believe it firmly,  
Only they could know the secret knowledge of Hariram  
Could be able to know little about the Hariram  
He is the almighty, he is the truth. (recite 3 times).

6) *Haaq Hari Ram Chandra tomake chal jaal dilam*  
*Seba korun apni.*  
*Jatitatta bhab satyo toma hotei shuni.*  
*Tomai bhabi dhyane gyane*  
*Aamar aar kono bancha naai.*  
*Palake palace Hariramchandra*  
*Jeno tomar dekha paai.*

**Translation**

Hariramchandra you are the truth, I offer you rice and water  
Please you kindly eat.  
All races and religions came from you  
I recite your name in my meditation and my thinking  
I do not have any other desire  
I only desire as if, in every step of my life  
Hariram I get your blessing.

### 6.3.6 Harirami Sermon

Hariram was an eloquent speaker and a gifted person. He by his speech could mesmerize everybody. Folk religions usually do not have any scriptures. For this reason the followers of folk religions find their necessary guideline in the devotional community songs and in the speeches of *Guru* as well. Hariram left some scholastic speeches which manifests the sophisticated philosophy and necessary guidelines for the followers. Below we mention some of them.

1) *Radhuni nei radhle ke*

*Ranna nei to khelen ki*

*Je radhle sei khele ei duniyar bhelki.*

#### **Translation**

There is no cook than who cooked ?

If there is no food then what to eat?

He who cooks he himself eats

It's an enigmatic game of the world.

2) *Jeyeo ache thekeo nai*

*Temoni tumi aar aami re bhai*

*Amra maare bachi beche mori.*

*Balaiyer eki bisham chaturi*

*Balaiyer eki bisham chaturi.*

#### **Translation**

He is here in spite of getting bid farewell

And similarly he is no more being into existence

Like that you and me in existence.

We be alive after death and die being into existence.

What a tricky game of Balai

What a tricky game of Balai.

3) *Tini taai tumi jaai*

*Jaa tini taai tumi.*

*Tini tumi*

*Ami bhabi, bhami adhagami.*



### **Translation**

He is that what you are  
And that is you what he is.  
You are he

I think and think and go downward.

- 4) *Jaam beta bhai dumukho thali*  
*Taai janyo or athta khali.*  
*O kebal khachhe khachhe*  
*Or pete ki kichhu thakchhe thakchhe thakchhe.*

### **Translation**

The death is like two-mouthed-bag  
This is why his belly is empty.  
He is always eating and eating  
Does anything remain in his belly?

- 5) *Chakkhu melile sakali paai*  
*Chakkhu mudile kichhui naai*  
*Deene sreesti rrate laai*  
*Nirantar ihai haai* (ibid. p. 123-124).

### **Translation**

Everything is in existence when eyes are opened  
Everything disappears when eyes are closed  
Day time is for creation night is for destroy  
This game is playing ceaselessly.

The above mantras bear the philosophical offshoot of *Balahari* cult. Sociologically speaking, like other preachers of different folk religions, Balaram Hari also through his teaching and preaching established the highness of very common people of the society. He was mentor and leader as well as savior of these people. This preaching and teaching of Balahari and establishing of Balahari cult has sociological significance which is more important than that of literary or religious study of *Balahari* community. The reason is, this cult movement started as a direct upheaval against the contemporary society and social religious bigotry. Balahari initiated a movement to establish the rights of very common people of the society through his movement. He spoke against religious leaders, social leaders as well as against the so called educated higher

class population. No members of upper class opted to become disciple of Balahari and no educated scholar or no leader of upper class showed any interest in Balahari and his community. In plain truth Balahari movement was absolutely a cult movement for and of the down trodden population in ideas and practice. But soon after the death of Balaram Hari, this cult rapidly started to decline due to the lack of proper leadership. When Balahari died, he left near about twenty thousand disciples, but just after one hundred years of his death, the movement almost subsided and very few numbers of followers could now be found scattered in different areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India. Question may arise why the movement finally failed with the departure of the founder. The answer could be found in the teaching and preaching of Balaram Hari which contained more realistic everyday life related issues. This teaching could not sustain very long because with the pace of time social structure, scenario have also changed and life pattern had been changing very fast. Later leadership of the cult failed to cope up with this changing situation, and failed to provide new direction for its disciples to follow the changing situation. This is the reason why this cult could not march forward in the same pace with the changing of time and could not uphold its importance. Secondly, in every folk religion of Bengal one can notice the practice of community ceremonies that contain some spiritual beliefs, *Guru*, sex-yogic practice and hilling system. All these psychologically attract the very common people of the society. These sort of activities were absent in Balahari cult. As a result in the long run, it failed to attract people like other cult religions. It is needless to say that with the changes in economic set up of the society the mode of belief also changes. This is true for all religious beliefs. To cope up with the changing situation appropriate leadership is needed. Ironically *Balahari* cult failed to produce such leadership later on and consequently failed to attract people and finally decayed, within a very short span of time a strong and popular cult like *Balahari* could really lost its existence forever.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

With the coming of the Islam through the Sufi saints in Bengal, revolutionary changes in the life and living of the ordinary subaltern population of the country occurred. These sub alterns who for centuries remained extremely subjugated under the Brahminical rules based on strict caste differentiation. In a society ruled by the formal procedure of rigid class and caste system, no doubt would create an atmosphere of unsociability, caste divisions and obviously as a consequence the system created severe social and human problems in inhuman shape. Thousand years-long stagnant social life of Bengal suddenly got new feeling and momentum in their daily

life and living. The old rudimentary social fabric based on strict caste based rules and regulations could not bear the sudden jolt of the call for equality, fraternity and brotherhood of Islam by the Sufis. The down trodden population from the lower stratum of the society started to think for themselves, for their own salvation under the new ideological call which opened an ample horizon for their own. The changes that occurred due to the advent of Sufiism in Bengal have more sociological implications rather than that of philosophical significance. It was Sufiism that succeeded in breaking the prejudiced; strictly caste based social set up of Bengal. People from lower stratum started converting to Islam under the patronage of Sufi saints. To protect Hinduism from the aggression of mass conversion to Islam, Sri Chaitanya appeared at this juncture of time and by creating Gaudiya Vaishnavism with a preaching of equality and brotherhood to a great extent could turn the stream in favor of Hindu life and living again. Later, all the cultic religions that emerged in Bengal in a sense could be termed as the off shoots of Gaudiya Vaishnavism with Sufi influence. I may conclude that if Sufi saints were not in Bengal, the appearance of Sri Chaitanya the imitator of Gaudiya Vaishnavism would not have been possible and thus the emergence of folk religions of Bengal would have been a far cry.

After the death of Sri Chaitanya his liberal *Jugadharma* lost its essence of communal harmony because the control of the same went in the hand of upper elite class people during eighteenth century a period when Bengal society was facing the devastation of the new rulers of Bengal the British. Under British Imperial rulers again the country lost its ideological base, ethics and values. Anarchy in socio-religious life started ruling over general people. To protect themselves from such anarchic situation, the lower stratum population rebelled against atrocities of the upper class population. Sometimes these revolts turned into armed struggles and in other case these were tacit in nature, in the form of defiance movements against norms, rituals and religious ideas of the upper caste and class. Thus, several liberal religious ideas emerged among the lower class population in Bengal and those are the folk religions that impacted deeply on the life and living patterns of the people at large.

One interesting findings is observable from our above discussion is that except Balahari cult the emergence of other cults, were initiated by Muslims. For example Aule Chand, the founder of Kartabhaja was believed to be a Muslim and again behind the emergence of the Sahebkhani cult a Muslim Fakir had an inseparable contribution. *Balahari* cult is an exception to this. *Balahari*, a lower caste watchman was the preacher of the cult and this could be the reason why, *Balahari* unlike other folk religions of Bengal ignores the importance of Sri Chaitanya Dev in the

development of its cultic philosophical base. Rather it tried to dignify *Balahari* over Sree Chaitanya Dev. Balahari is regarded by his followers as the Supreme being and the creator of the universe stating that Rama and other deities are the incarnation of Bahahari which is really a projection to set *Balahari* over all Hindu deities. This is a clear example of defiance against the existing social norms and religious ideas. The reason for such defiance against the existing norms and values could be due to the fact that Balahari was assaulted by the Hindu social and religious leaders for which he took a strong stand against Hindu religion. But in the other folk cults which we have discussed above the initiatives of those were taken by Muslim holy men whose principal target was to unify all lower class people under the same umbrella for their social and spiritual liberty.

The principal target of all the cultic religions was to bring both spiritual and social liberty for the lower class population who had been exploited severely by the upper caste and class people by using religions as their weapons of exploitation for centuries. Folk religions, therefore could be termed as insolent attempts to rescue the wretched, down trodden people of the society from the persecution of the upper class population who had been for centuries treating the poorer people as untouchable inhuman being by denying them their social, religious, economic or cultural rights. These folk religions called for establishing a society where these down trodden population can live with dignity and honor, having all their social rights. In most cases, this is why; in folk religions both spiritualism and materialism were emphasized. It needs to be mentioned that spirituality in folk religions crept up centering mystic philosophy of human body. For this reason in every folk religion some common mystic *Sadhana* concerning body could be seen with the help of which the followers of the cultic religions attempt to get the spiritual as well as social liberty. As we know that the followers of the folk religions come from the very poorer segment of the society and for this reasons their body mystic *Sadhana* partly is sex-yogic. This is the reason why in some folk religions woman are placed with supreme importance and without woman the followers believe that by no means the *Sadhana* could be performed. Woman is treated as conscious *Guru* as well the preceptor of the preceptor and in some cases woman is regarded as God, without who's kind mercy no devotee can get due success in their *Sadhana*. A votary must practice the philosophy of being *JentoMora* (living dead) by converting sex pleasure into love passion -which according to the cultic philosophy is the symbol of true devotion. And through the process of *Pranayam* a votary has to try to hold the control over the downward tendency of semen by pumping up the same upwards and finally succeed in retaining semen. It is

true for *Sahebdhani* and *Kartabhoja* cult but not applicable to *Balahari* cult. The inner reason for such cultic practice to some extent could be attributed to the fact that birth control was necessary for the followers of these cultic religions. Thus birth control became one of the principal methods of body mystic *Sadhana* of all the folk religions because population boom could cause misery for the members of the cults. For birth control different methods are followed in all folk religions of Bengal and prioritizing preservation of semen is one such method. Semen is considered as the core essence of human life and the core capital given by God for which God will take account.

Followers of *Balahari* cult believe that woman is not necessary for practicing *Sadhana*. According to their cultic belief both male and female being exists within this human body as the spirit of *Balahari*. So participation of woman is not essential for performing their cultic *Sadhana*. *Guruvada* in all folk religions is a common and very significant *Tatta* where guru is considered as the principal mentor and guide for the followers. The followers of all cultic religions do not believe in any supernatural being controlling human being and for their salvation they rely on human *guru*.

Hence, the folk religions emerged as the shelters for the destitute people of the lower stratum of the society, so, all the mantras of all folk religions whether in written or oral form, are spelled out in a very communicable language for the common people of the society so that the target people could easily understand the essence of the mantras.

Another common phenomenon of all the folk religions is the role of versifiers to disseminate the philosophy and sketching out guidelines for the followers. Lalon Fakir, Lal Shashi, Kubir and Jadubindu were the versifiers of *Baul* (*I have discussed on Baulism in separate two chapters chapter 7 and 8*), *Kartabhoja* and *Sahebdhani* respectably. Ram Das and Jaladhar were the versifiers of *Balahari* cult. Mentionable is that Kubir and Jadubindu of *Sahebdhani* community and Lalon Fakir of *Baul* community are very famous and in some instances the huge popularity of *Sahebdhani* and *Baul* are partly due to the role of these versifiers.

Each and every folk religion such as *Baul*, *Kartabhoja*, *Sahebdhani* and *Balahari* has some special cultic norms taboos of their own. These are mostly common in nature and character by which the followers of those communities tried to establish a society within which the followers of the cult could lead a life that resemblance somewhat like a communist society. It is meaningfully more applicable to the *Baul* cult. Their concept of equality and equity are really is the replica of a true communist society where everybody is equally treated in respect of caste, class, clan and social position.

Through the cultic practices in all the folk religions, the dignity of human being had been initiated to found societies where everyone; irrespective of class, caste, color and creed would be treated as true human being. Their endeavor was to create discrimination less society. But the crucial reality is that, these attempts at the end failed. These cultic religions of Bengal follow such norms, values, ethics that apparently maintains equality with each other. In reality, they failed to achieve their goal for society for their own. The reason is these cultic religions gave more emphasis on the spiritual sphere by ignoring material reality. This is why; their dream remained utopian. But we must acknowledge that these cultic religions to some extent were able to establish a society within the arena of greater society for protecting their followers from the social and religious wraths of the ruling elites. This resulted in an alienating situation for the members of the cults. The followers followed a life within their own set up that is very different from the greater social set up. It was and still very difficult for the followers to make a compromise between this two system. As a result the devotees of the cults remains alienated from the greater society. The common goal of all these cultic religions was for establishing separate societies of their own but they failed. These cultic religions that emerged in Bengal during 19<sup>th</sup> century were basically cultural defiance or tacit revolts against the existing society and social system. Through this tacit revolts visibly could not initiate any change in the social system, but it has to be recognized that these were meaningful attempts of the destitute population for getting social justice as well as for their spiritual liberty. There remains the sociological significance of these cultic religious beliefs.

## CHAPTER 7

### Origin and Development of Bauls in Bengal

#### 7.0 Introduction:

Baulism is a doctrine, a method of adoration for humanity and also is a religious belief in language of Ashkoy Kumar Dutta is a worshiper community (Dutta. A. K.2008; p.56 ). Bauls are deep rooted part of the flamboyant cultural heritage of Bengal. The use of the word 'Baul' could be traced back in early 16th century Bengali literary classics like Chaitanya Bhagavata written by Brindavan Das Thakur as well as in the Chaitanya Charitamrita of Krishnadas Kaviraj. Baul philosophy has mixed elements of Tantrikism, Sufi Islam, Vaishnavism and Buddhism. Some scholars also had attempted to establish a link between Baul thought with that of the ancient practices of Yoga as well as with the Charyapadas which are basically Buddhist hymns. In spite of all the above facts it is still difficult to construct a social history of the Bauls with concrete evidences. The reason is, Bauls do not have any written documents about their origin and on their later development. The Bauls themselves could be held responsible for the lack of any historical records on them because of their reluctance to leave traces behind. Baulism also gave birth to a top School of Bangla musical tradition, and Baul philosophical expressions are entirely manifested in the lyrics of the music that they created and orally express the same by singing those lyrics in their everyday life. Dr. Jeanne Openshaw commented that the music of the Bauls appears to have been passed down entirely in oral form until the end of the 19th century when it was first transcribed by outside observers. (Sarvepalli. R and Charles. M. 1989. p.227). In mid18<sup>th</sup> century, British Government for the first time took initiative to record the Bauls as a major sect of rural Bengal.

Baulism has its philosophical roots in different folk religious traditions that existed in Bengal from remote past, such as from "Nathism" a religious tradition which combines ideas of Brahminism, from Budhhist Shahajia ideas, from Shaibaism, from Vaisnav Shahajia tradition and also from Sufi Islam. The humane philosophical approach of Shahajia and that of Sufi-ism reigned supreme among the exploited mass people as means of emancipation from all sorts of social injustice imposed by the ruling elites on the subaltern population of Bengal for long. These ideas profoundly exerted influence in the development of Baulism in Bengal. However; the basic

theoretical assumption of Baul religious doctrine and philosophy has similarity with that of the idea of 'Radha-Krishna or idea of 'duality in one' that is about nature and human being, or 'absolute or supreme being' of 'Sufism' and Upanishad.

There are debates among the scholars about the origin of the term 'Baul' and also about the origin of the Baul as community. It is assumed that etymologically the term 'Baul' originated from the word 'Baur' which means disorderly, careless and mad. Prof. Ahmed Sharif, pointed out on the similarity of the word 'Baul' with that of the word 'Baura' meaning mad a popular parlance of Uttar Pradesh, India. Again he also mentioned that the word 'Baul' could also be originated from the words; 'Aur'(disorderly) and 'Byakul (careless). (Sharif. A. p.52). Some other scholars also suggested that the word 'Baul' derived its origin from 'Batul' meaning, insane, mad and crazy. Some are of the opinion that 'Baul' came from the word 'Aul'. Aul originated from Arabic Aulia (meaning holy man). Ahamed Sharif remarked; "...it is possible that the word 'Baul' originated from the word 'Byakul' or 'Batul'. The logic behind these assumptions is that, 'Bauls' as a community never had any honor or dignity in the eyes of the upper-class people of the land. Thus it could be assumed that from 'Byakul' (confused) or 'Batul' (worthless, crazy, mad) the followers were sarcastically named as Bauls, again it is also difficult to deny that the word originated from 'Aul' of 'Aul'."

The customary idea about the origin of the Baul sect is that, after the death of Chaitannadev the great 16<sup>th</sup> century religious reformer, his followers disseminated his ideas as a movement throughout Bengal and its adjacent areas. After the demise of Chaitannya Dev, Krishnadas Kaviraj wrote his famous book depicting the life and preaching of Chaitannya Dev titled "Chaitannya Charitamritta." In this biographical sketch of Sri Chaitannya, Krishnadas Kaviraj mentioned about Baulism. Approximately 1625 AD is said to be the year when Baulism as a separate minor religion surfaced in the soil of Bengal. It is believed that one Madhabbib and Awulchand were the creator of Baul sect. Later, one Birchandra or Birvadra a disciple of Madhabbib and son of Nittanondo popularized Baulism among the mass population of the then Bengal. It needs to be mentioned here that, though Baulism had surfaced in 17<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, but its core philosophical ideas were known to the mass people from long past. (Bhattacharya. U.2001. p.1).



### **7.1. Philosophical foundation of Baulism**

The philosophical foundation of the Baul sect is deeply rooted in the traditional Lokayata philosophy of the land. Though Baulism started its institutional journey in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it has a long historical past. In course of its long journey, Baulism in mid 17<sup>th</sup> century could finally establish itself as the most popular minor religious doctrine, dedicated for emancipating the subaltern population of rural Bengal from the religious and social persecution of the ruling elites. Baulism as a doctrine thus could be termed as a defiant ideology against the ruling philosophy- the philosophy of the higher class people of the society and surfaced in the soil of Bengal with an aspiration to protect the down trodden population of Bengal from social and religious maltreatment of the ruling class. It has already been narrated earlier about the movement of Sri Chaitanya Dev, the pioneer of mystic movements in Bengal. Before Chaitannya Dev's movement, Brahminic social customs and rituals had been belittling the human dignity so mercilessly that the lower stratum population literally were treated like that of animals by the upper caste elites. This persecution of the lower stratum population continued for long. But with the advent of Islam in Bengal, scenario started changing rapidly. People of en masse turned their face towards the new faith of Islam that called for equality of human beings. This was a serious blow to the ruling religious doctrine and to the interest of the ruling Hindu elites. In this juncture of Bengal history, Sri Chaitannya appeared in the cultural arena of Bengal. He eased the rigid caste based Hinduism, called for religious equality of human being and established Gudiya Vaisnabism. The reform movement of Chaitannya Dev to a great extent slowed down religious conversion of the lower caste Hindus to Islam. In spite of Sri Chaitannya's efforts, the influence of humanitarian appeal of Islam preached by the Sufis, could not be erased from the mindset of the rural people at large. On the other hand after the death of Sri Chaitannya, the leadership of the Vaishnaba movement went into the hands of the ruling caste Hindu elites and once again the very essence of Chaitannya Dev's preaching of equality among human beings diminished very rapidly. In the above context, we would now discuss about the origin of the Baulism in Bengal.

### **7.2 Historical Background of the emergence of Baulism**

It has already been mentioned earlier that the followers of Baul sect believe that, one Beer Bhaddra (1473-1544), the son of Nityananda, was the originator of the community. He became a disciple of a Muslim pious woman named Madhab Bibi. Madhab Bibi taught necessary lessons

on Baulism to his disciple Beerbhadra. (Rahim. A. p. 304). Duddu Shah, Lalon's principal disciple mentioned it in one of his verse. He wrote,

*Nitya Nander dui purush hai*

*Beer Bhadra, Beer Churamoni koy*

*Duijan dui moter Gosain*

*Shunte paai.*

*Derveshi Bauler kriya*

*Beerbadra jane sei dhara*

*Dervish Lalon sainer kothai*

*Duddu janai tai.*

### **Translation**

Nityananda had two sons

They are Beer Bhadra and Beer Churamoni

They preached two different doctrines

It is written in the history.

Dr. Enamul Haq pointed out that Baulism by no means developed before sixteenth century and purely was a product of the soil of Bengal. In course of time it was successful in surfacing itself as an important cult movement among the poorer segment of the rural society. Dr. Enamul Haq quoting evidences from the historical sources came to the conclusion that, before the rise of Vaisnavism in Bengal, no notable evidences of any minor religious cult could be found. Kartabhaja, Sain, Nera, Fakir, Jikir and so on, all these cultic religious sects that appeared in the rural scenario of Bengal, in fact were later development as offshoots of Baulism. Further; Dr. Enamul Haque stated that after the advent of Sufism, the Lokayata philosophy-that served as the foundation for establishment of all minor religious sects in Bengal-became more fertile by Sufi thoughts and its humanistic approach. In sixteenth century under the direct influence of Sufism and Vaisnavism a new cult developed among the illiterate, indigent people of lower caste and class and that was Baulism. (Ahmed. S. M. 2008. p. 85).

The core philosophical development of the Baulism, its inner mysticism and esoteric method of austerity were the domino effect of socio-economic exploitation and persecution of the people of lower class and caste by the upper caste ruling elites. History tells us that, people of lower class and caste of Indian society were considered as untouchables by the upper caste elites and the

lower caste wretched population were not even allowed to touch holy religious scriptures, or to enter a temple and to pay homage to or worship God. As a consequence, the subaltern population started to look for their own way of living and performing religious rituals. The result was the emergence of cultic religions among lower class and caste population of which Baulism was the pioneer. We may say that Baulism was the outcome of social injustice, prejudice or bigotry of the upper caste against the subaltern population of rural Bengal. In view of the above it can be said that emergence of Baul cult and subsequent cultic religions were in fact cultural revolution of the lower class people in the soil of Bengal against the ideological and social hegemony of the ruling elites. ( Hossain. A. I. 2016. p. 45).

Contribution of Chaitanya Dev in the development of Baul philosophy to some extent could be termed as illusive. In fact the person who in actual was behind the scene in surfacing Baulism was one Madhab Bibi about whom we have already mentioned earlier. Regrettably her name is usually noted down by the researchers trivially while discussing the development of Baulism in Bengal. The reason is, Beer Bahdra was the person under whose apparent leadership Baulism spread rapidly among the mass people of rural Bengal. Beer Bhadra was a disciple of Madhab Bibi. From her, Beer Bhadra had his lessons on Baulism and later popularized the ideology. Dr. Ahmed Sharif stated ‘.....according to the popular belief among the followers of Baul Sects, Baulism was preached by Madhab Bibi in association with her Guru (spiritual guide) Awul Chand.’ But the ideology became popular among people during mid seventeenth century by the efforts of Beer Bhadra and finally it reached its zenith under the leadership of Lalon Shah the great sage of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. (Sharif. A. 2009. p. 52). Dr. Sharif mentioned the name of Awul Chand along with Madhab Bibi as the initiator of Baulism. But the fact remains; Awul Chand was the originator of Kortabhoja cult and not of Baul cult. From the very same reference of Dr. Sharif, this fact can be determined. Dr. Sharif explained that Awul Chand was famous as Fakir Thakur and was believed by the followers that he was an incarnation of Sri Chaitannya. This Awul Chand was the initiator of Kortabhoja cult. (ibid). Dr. Sharif concluded that though Madhab Bibi was a disciple of Awul Chand but later on she did not follow her Guru’s cult and preached a new ideology based on which the Baul cult was formed. It is therefore imperative to mention the name of Madhab Bibi with equal emphasis along with others as the originator of Baul religion in Bengal.

In view of the above dissuasion, it can certainly be concluded that Baulism is a defiant ideology that emerged in the soil of Bengal as a consequence of prolonged sufferings of the mass people due to social, economic and cultural repression of the ruling elites on them. It is our own philosophy; a philosophy and cult religion of rural Bengal. Bauls in fact triggered a cultural revolution against all sorts of religious and social bigotry. Baul is a reformative group whose philosophical thoughts aimed at upholding human dignity by defying all sorts of social, religious discrimination and economic disparity.

### **7.3 Philosophical Background of Baulism**

Baulism as a philosophy could be viewed as an amalgamation of different Lokayata philosophies, Tantrism, Sufi-ism, Buddhist Sahajiya, Nathism and Vaisnava ideologies. In the following passages brief discussions of the different philosophical roots of Baulism is presented.

#### **7.3.1 Lokayata Darshan**

Lokaya philosophy comprised of three philosophical trends, Charvak, Shankkhya, and Yoga. We would now discuss about these three schools of Lokayat Philosophy in the following passages.

##### **7.3.1.1 Charvaka**

Lokayata Darshan or Lokayata Philosophy is a branch of Indian philosophy also is known as Charvaka. It assumes various forms of materialism, philosophical skepticism and religious indifference. (Chattapadhyay. L. 2012; p.52). This system of philosophy is classified as a heterodox Hindu (Nāstika) system (ibid) and is characterized as a materialistic and atheistic school of thought. Chārvāka emerged as defiant alternative to the orthodox Hindu pro-Vedic Āstika (theist) schools. Charvaka could also be termed as the philosophical predecessor to subsequent nāstika (atheist) philosophies of the same period such as Ājīvika, Jainism and Buddhism. The latter two schools grew into separate religions in the classical period of Indian philosophy. (Flood, G.1996. p.224). As opposed to other schools, the first principle of Chārvāka philosophy was the rejection of any supernatural inference as a means to establish metaphysical truths. (Richard. K. 1999. p.17). Etymologically, the word Chārvāka connotes “Charu Vak” meaning “sweet talk” or “agreeable speech” (chāru – agreeable, pleasant or sweet and Vāk – speech) and Lokāyata signifies “prevalence in the world” (loka – world and āyata – prevalent).

(ibid). The name Lokāyata can be traced to Kautilya's Arthashastra, which refers to three ānvīkshikīs (logical philosophies) Yoga, Sankhya and Lokāyata(ibid).

Kautilya in his book *Arthasahasra* did not consider Lokayata philosophy as philosophy of materialism, rather, he referred to Lokāyata as a part of Vedic lore. Probably Kautilya by Lokayata meant logic or science of debate (disputation, "criticism") and not to the materialist doctrine. (Hossain. A. I. 2016. p.52). In 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Saddaniti and Buddhaghosa two ancient scholars referred "Lokāyatiks" or Lokyata philosophers as Vitandas (sophists). In an around 6th century BC use of the term Lokāyata was restricted to the school of the materialists. The term Chārvāka was first used in the 7th century BC by the philosopher Purandara, who referred to his fellow materialists as 'the Chārvākas.' Later the term was used by Kamalshila and Haribhadra in the 8th century BC. By the 8th century BC the terms Chārvāka, Lokāyata, and Bārhaspatya were used interchangeably to signify materialism. Ajita Kesakambali, a senior contemporary of the Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century BC), is considered as the earliest documented materialist in India. (Richard. K. 1999. p.22). It is believed that he probably inspired the basic tenets of Chārvāka philosophy i.e. of no soul and existence of four (not five) elements. (Hossain. A. I. 2016. p. 53). Although in India, materialist schools existed prior to Chārvāka, but it was the only school which in reality systematized Indian materialist philosophy by setting them down in the form of aphorisms in 6th century B.C. There was a base text, a collection of *sūtras* or aphorisms and several commentaries were written to explicate the aphorisms.( Richard. K. ibid). E. W. Hopkins, in his 'The Ethics of India (1924)' claimed that, "Chārvāka philosophy was contemporary to Jainism and Buddhism, mentioning the old Chārvāka or materialist of the 6th century BC". Rhys Davids the famous Indologist, assumed that, "lokāyata in 500 BC was a philosophy of 'skepticism' in general without yet being organized as a philosophical school, and that the name of a villain in the epic Mahabharata, Chārvāka, was attached to the position in order to disparage it." The earliest positive statement of skepticism is preserved from the epic period, in Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda, chapter 108, where Jabāli the great epic saint tries to persuade Rāma to accept the kingdom by using nāstika arguments (but Rāma then refutes him in chapter 109) by stating "O, the highly wise! Arrive at a conclusion, therefore, that there is nothing beyond this Universe. Give precedence to that which meets the eye and turn your back on what is beyond our knowledge. (2.108.17)"

The Chārvāka School thus appeared to have gradually grown out of generic skepticism in the Mauryan period. But its existence as an organized body of thought cannot be ascertained for times predating the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Chārvāka was a living philosophy up to the 12th century AD after which this system seems to have disappeared without leaving any trace. The reason for this sudden disappearance is not known. Brihaspati who is said to be the Dev Guru, (tutor of the Gods) sometimes referred to as the founder of Chārvāka or Lokāyata philosophy. The earliest direct quote from Brihaspati's lost writings is found in the text '*Sarvasiddhantasamgraha*', which is sometimes controversially attributed to Shankara. In the '*Sarvasiddhantasamgraha*', the author quotes Brihaspati as follows. "Chastity and other such ordinances are laid down by clever weaklings; gifts of gold and land, the pleasure of invitations to dinner, are devised by indigent people with stomachs lean in hunger. The building of temples, houses for water-supply, tanks, wells, resting places, and the like, pleases only travelers, not others. The Agnihotra ritual, the three Vedas, the triple staffs, the ash smearing, is the ways of gaining a livelihood for those who are lacking in intellect and energy. The wise should enjoy the pleasures of this world through the more appropriate available means of agriculture, tending cattle, trade, political administration, etc". (Ibid).

Baul philosophical ideology had its core essence from Lokayat Philosophy. In our above discussion we tried to make it clear that the major thrust of Lokayata Philosophy was to oppose the presence of any external force in controlling the fate of human being and thus denying the theist actions in the name of religion to control the society. This quasi-philosophical Indian school of materialists rejected the notion of an afterworld, karma, liberation (moksha), the authority of the sacred scriptures, the Vedas, and the immortality of the self. Baulism followed the same route and declared the highness of human being, denied the authority of the scared scripts, notion of afterworld and so on.

### **7.3.1.2 Sankhya Philosophy**

Two schools of philosophy emerged in India based on Upanishada. These are: (1) Sankhya (realistic) and (2) The Vedantic (idealistic) Sankhya school of thought is considered as one of the most prominent and oldest of Indian Lokayata philosophies. It is believed that an eminent great saint Kapila was the founder of the Sankhya School of thought. The Sankhya philosophy combines the basic doctrines of Sankhya and Yoga. However Shankhya basically is the

theoretical interpretation of the philosophy and Yoga by representing the application of the philosophy or to be more precise the practical aspects of the same.

The term Sankhya is derived from the Sanskrit word *sankhya* meaning 'number'. "The school specifies the number and nature of the ultimate constituents of the universe and thereby imparts knowledge of reality. In fact, the term *Sankhya* also means perfect knowledge. Thus it can also be termed as a philosophy that advocates perfect knowledge. (Hossain. A. I. 2016. p. 152). Sankhya philosophy is the proponent of dualistic realism. According to Sankhya darshan in everyday life we meet two ultimate realities: *Prakriti*, that is matter and *Purusha* which is the self (spirit). "In Sankhya philosophy both matter and spirit are considered as equally real. Sankhya philosophy is pluralistic in nature because its teaching says *Purusha* is not one but many. (Chattapadhyay. D. 2012. p. 122).

The Sankhya proposes that all physical realities exist based on some finest and subtlest stuff or principle. Sankhya named it as *Prakriti*. By *Prakriti* Sankhya philosophy identifies primordial substance behind the world. According to Sankhya *Prakriti* is the material cause of the world, it is the first and ultimate cause of all gross and subtle objects. (ibid). Thus *Prakriti* according to Sankhya philosophy is matter, a non-self entity and is devoid of consciousness " *Prakriti* is unintelligible and gets greatly influenced by the *Purusha*, the self. It can only manifest itself as the various objects of experience of the *Purusha*. *Prakriti* is a combination of three *gunas* (qualities), namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. "The term *guna*, in ordinary sense means quality or nature. But here, it is to be understood in the sense of constituent (component) in Sankhya. *Sattva* is concerned with happiness. While *rajas* is concerned with action, *tamas* is associated with ignorance and inaction. (Hossain. A. I. ibid). According to Sankhya, the efficient cause of the world is *Purusha* and the material cause is the *Prakriti*. Here *Purusha* stands for the 'Supreme spirit' and *Prakriti* stands for 'matter'. " *Purusha* (spirit) is the first principle of Sankhya. *Prakriti* is the second, the material principle of Sankhya. *Purusha* is neither produced nor does it produce. *Prakriti* is not produced but it produces. *Prakriti* is uncaused. It is eternal. It itself is not produced but it has inherent potential or tendency to produce.(ibid).

The relation between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* may be compared to that between a magnet and a piece of iron, like man and woman. *Purusha* itself does not come into contact with *Prakriti*. But it influences *Prakriti*. Thus, the *Prakriti* is prompted to produce. As the *gunas* undergo more and more changes, *Prakriti* goes on differentiating into numerous, world-objects. Thus it becomes

more and more determinate. This is what is termed as evolution. (ibid). In evolution, *Prakriti* is transformed and differentiated into multiplicity of objects. Evolution is followed by dissolution. In dissolution the physical existence, all the worldly objects mingle back into *Prakriti*, which now remains as the undifferentiated, primordial substance. This is how the cycles of evolution and dissolution follow each other.

#### **7.3.1.2.1 Sankhya and Existence of God**

Kapila the proponent of Shankhya school of thought rules out the existence of God. He asserts that the existence of God cannot be proved and as such God does not exist. Sankhya argues that “if God exists and if God is eternal and unchanging as is widely claimed, then he cannot be the cause of the world. A cause has to be active and changing. However some of the later commentators of Sankhya seem to bend towards theistic interpretation. Chattapadhyay. D. ibid).

#### **7.3.1.2.2 Bondage and Salvation**

Sankhya philosophy like other major systems of Indian philosophy, considers ignorance as the root cause of bondage and suffering. According to Sankhya, “the self is eternal, pure consciousness. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with the physical body and its constituents - *Manas*, *ahamkara* and *Mahat*, which are products of *Prakriti*. Once the self becomes free of this false identification and the material bonds, the salvation is possible. (ibid). In short according to Shankhya philosophical school, *Purusha* is the passive being and this is because, the success of Purush depends on Prokriti. For this reason, in cultic philosophical beliefs of Bengal, *Prokriti* is considered as the *Chetan Guru*. This is why *Prokriti* is also considered as the primordial matter as well as primordial power. In Baulism as well as in all the cultic philosophy this *Purush Prokriti tatta* is taken with high prominence and is manifested in man woman relation.

#### **7. 3.1.3 Yoga Philosophy**

Another important branch of Lokayata philosophical schools that emerged in Indian soil as part of Shankhya darshan is yoga philosophy. This philosophical practice later became an inseparable part in the cultic religious *Sadhana* or practice. It could be termed as the applied method of Lokayata philosophy. The Yoga Sutra, widely regarded as the authoritative text on yoga, is a collection of aphorisms, outlining the eight limbs of yoga. These "threads" (as *sutra* translates from Sanskrit) of wisdom offer guidelines for living a meaningful and purposeful life.



Patanjali is said to be the introducer of yoga school of philosophy. But some scholars have different opinion as well. Professor Dr, Surendranath Dash Gupta in his book *A History of Indian Philosophy vol-1* claimed that, even before Patanjali Yoga philosophy was in existence and Patanjali had no role in establishing the school of Yoga philosophy. Patanjali himself did not claim to be the introducer of Yoga philosophy. But Patanjali should be credited for compiling all scattered *sutras* (theory) related to Yoga and he provided explanations of these sutras of Yoga philosophy by applying numerical method that helped Yoga school of thought in establishing itself as a philosophical doctrine. In fact the existence of Yoga philosophy could be traced back in the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda as well.

As has been mentioned earlier, Yoga philosophy in course of its journey had been adopted by different cultic religions as well as by mainstream religions as the applied method for their *Sadhanas*. Yoga philosophical applications are basically body centric. For performing mystic body *Sadhana*, application of Yoga is a must for the votary. According to the belief of Yoga and Sankhya philosophers, the realization of the soul as the conscious being is the principal way for the salvation from the bandage of this mundane life, which should be the ultimate goal for human beings. . And, this is why the votary follows the eightfold methods of Yoga philosophy to make the body and mind calm and quite by concentrating in meditation. These eightfold methods are a) Jaam, b) Niyam, c) Asan, d) Pranayam, e) Protyahar, f) Dharana, g) Dhyan and h) Samadhi. A major part of Baul religious rituals is based on Yoga. Among the aforesaid eightfold method of Yoga, Asan, Pranayam, Dhyan and Samadhi have been adopted by Baul sect for performing the *Sadhana* like other cultic religions of Bengal.

#### **7.3.1.4 Tantraism**

The Sanskrit word Tantra originated from the root Tan, meaning "Expand" or "Extend." Combined with the suffix Tra, Tantra, bears the meaning "Appear" or "Emerge." The origins of Tantraism can be dated back to Indus Civilization which existed between approximately 2,700 and 1750 B.C. Early Tantraism attempted to integrate the limited sensory perceptions of the individual with the cosmic forces of the universe and thereby creating a unity of duality -- blending the finite with the infinite. Today, Tantraism is more universally known because of its large followings among different cultic schools which came into existence during the sixth and seventh centuries A.D — reflecting both Hindu and Buddhist ideology. These schools of thought

focus on the development of the individual's dormant spiritual powers by means of refined ritual and meditation techniques.(ibid).

The tantric tradition originated as an ideological development within Vedic religion in and around first millennium BC. In the stream of time, Vedic religious practices went through a remarkable series of transformations. Vedic tradition transitioned from ancient to classical traditions. This was the period during which both the tantric and the Bhakti devotional movements emerged. While the latter drew from the tendency toward monotheism seen in late Vedic literature, Tantrism developed from Vedic ritual traditions as well as from the yogic and meditative traditions that developed both within ancient Hinduism as well as in rival Buddhist and Jaina traditions. (Gray, David B. .p.11). Hinduism as currently practiced is a product of the intermixture of tantric and devotional approaches that had been practiced during the first millennium. (ibid. p. 2).

Though Tantrikism originated in Vedic Hindu context but never kept itself limited to Vedic Hinduism only. It had a striking impact on South Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions that leads to the development of distinctly Buddhist tantric traditions. Tantrikism also exerted real impact on Jainism and Budhdhism and on many small cultic religions of Bengal and that of greater India. Later Tantric practices rapidly transmitted to Southeast, East, and Central Asia, leading to the establishment of several distinct East Asian and Tibetan traditions of Tantrikism. These, in turn, played an important role on the development of Daoism and Shintoism in East Asian as well as the Bön tradition in Tibet. (ibid. p.-3).

#### **7.3.1.4.1 Defining Tantraism**

The term *tantra* in modern religious languages is frequently used to conjure notions of effective black magic, illicit sexuality, and immoral behavior. (Douglas B.1990 . page, 5). Western scholars researching on Indian culture and history often treated “tantric traditions with disdain, using its alleged degeneracy as an excuse to ignore this important aspect of Asian religious history.( Hugh B. 2003. p.15.).

Due to manifold traditions spanning several religious practices and diverse cultural worlds made Tantrikism significantly challenging to come up with an adequate definition that could broadly be applied to address all of the tantric traditions. “The tantric traditions have been given several labels, but there is no single label that is accepted by all of these traditions. The adjective *tantric*, an English word derived from the Sanskrit term *tāntrika*, means simply that which relates to the

*tantras*, the genre of scripture that serves as the canonical basis for the various tantric traditions. Tantras are works that primarily focus on ritual and meditative practices, so the term *tantric* also envelops the practices associated with these scriptures, which were traditionally disseminated by the *tāntrikas* (the Sanskrit term also designates tantric practitioners), along with the texts” (ibid. p.5). So we may say that “communities involved with ‘tantric traditions’ practice, preserve, and transmit through both time and space, follow both the texts and practices traditions associated with tantras could be termed as Tantriks.”(ibid. p. 7).

One of the most important tantric traditions is that of lineage, the transmission of teachings along an uninterrupted lineage, from master to disciple, the so-called *guruparamparā*. This focus on lineage is found throughout the tantric world; originating in India, this emphasis was transmitted to Tibet and East Asia and remains an important concern of contemporary tantric communities. (ibid).

In view of our above discussion, it would be ideal to define Tantra in terms of a single defining characteristic. One solution to this problem is to delineate a range of features that tend to characterize tantric traditions. This was done by Teun Goudriaan, who first attempted to define “Tantrism” in terms of union with divinity. He defined it as “the systematic quest for salvation or for gaining spiritual excellence by realizing and fostering the bipolar, bisexual divinity within one’s own body. (Teun. G. 1981. p. 172.). He then went on to list a number of “tantric elements” that characterize this path to practice, including distinct paths of practice (*sādhana*), the use of mantras and mandalas, visualization and worship of the deities, distinct initiation ceremonies, and yogic practices involving the subtle body.

This definition is quite useful as it indicates the range of ritual and contemplative techniques employed by tantric practitioners in order to achieve magical powers (*siddhi*) as well as liberation. “Liberation in the Hindu theistic traditions is generally defined as the attainment of union with or proximity to the supreme deity, while it is defined as the achievement of the awakening of a Buddha by Buddhists. For both traditions liberation is characterized by both knowledge and freedom (Ibid. p. 8).

As there was, however, considerable borrowing among these traditions, there are commonalities that can be found among these traditions, although they are diverse enough to resist reduction to a single defining quality shared by all of them.

#### **7.3.1.4.2 The Origins of Tantric Traditions**

Attempts to unearth the root aspects of tantric traditions in the distant past depend on speculations. These traditions in their emergence were heavily rests on earlier Indian traditions of thought and practices. One of the biggest influences on tantric traditions was the far older Vedic tradition of Hinduism. “Vedic Hinduism featured the priestly class, Brahmins, who had the sacred duty to memorize the oral sacred literature of the tradition, the *Vedas*, and also learn the complex ritual practices the tradition advocated”(ibid). These rituals focused on offerings to the gods made into a sacred fire, which ranged from largely vegetarian offerings made into small domestic (*gr̥ ihya*) fires that householders were to maintain to the larger “solemn” (*śrauta*) rites that required animal sacrifice. The tradition developed during 1500–500 B.C, reaching its peak around 500 B.C, just prior to rise of the renouncing traditions that would challenge it. Although there was tension between advocates of the Vedic tradition and advocates of *some* of the tantric traditions, the tantric traditions drew heavily from Vedic ritual practice traditions nonetheless. (Ibid. p. 9).

#### **7.3.1.4.3 Influence of Tantraism on Other Religious Traditions**

Tantric Hindu and Buddhist traditions influenced a number of other religious traditions, both within South Asia as well as in other areas of the world. Because tantric tradition first emerged in South Asia, obviously its impact in this region was naturally the most significant. The South Asian traditions that were influenced by the tantric traditions to some degree include Jainism, Islam, and Sikhism. Daoism and the Shintō tradition in East Asia. These were influenced by East Asian tantric Buddhist traditions, and the Bön tradition of Tibet was thoroughly transformed by its encounter with tantric Buddhism. Lastly, the “New Age” spiritual movement that developed in the West during the latter half of the 20th century was also strongly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions (Ibid; p. 25). Minor religions like Baulism, Kartabhaja, etc. that emerged in Bengal had also been heavily influenced by Tantric traditions.

#### **7.3.1.4.4 Tantraism in Bengal**

Life and living of the lower stratum population of Bengal had also been greatly influenced by Tantrik tradition. Tantrism is one of the oldest philosophies of the world and usually is practiced by very common people of the society till today. It was basically developed in the agrarian social set up of India. In the chapter of Anusashan of Mahabharat, there is a mention of the term

*Kulshya Tantra* which means as the principal action in keeping up a family in regular success, i.e propagation. (Sharif. A. 2012. p. 31). Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and Kamrup of Himalayan region are combinedly called as *Maha chin*, and this region was once known as the Tantric regions of greater India. Shashibhushan Dasgupta stated that in greater India Tantrism once had great influence. The Himalayan belt, from Kashmir in the North-West India to Tibet, Bhutan, Kamrup and Bengal were especially renowned as the Tantric region. (ibid). Prof. Ahmad Sharif mentioned that Sankhya, Yoga and Tantra all these philosophical ideas had emerged as non-Aryan philosophies. In ancient period the land that we called Bangladesh to day was basically a non Aryan dominated land and never in this land could Aryans establish their domination absolutely. (ibid. p. 31). Tantraism flourished in the fertile soil of Bengal with its own fervor. Tantrism had have great influence on two religious philosophies i.e. Hinduism and Budhdhism. Shashibhushan Dasgupta observed, “Tantrism with its heterogeneous nature is neither exclusively Hindu, nor exclusively Buddhist in origin. It is an ancient religious cult of India manifesting itself sometimes as Hindu ideology being associated with Hindu theology, thoughts and ideas and sometimes as Buddhist in association with later Buddhist theology, thoughts and ideas. (Dasgupta S. 1975. p.20). It could thus be concluded that Tantrism as a philosophical idea emerged as an offshoot of the Lokayata philosophy of the lower class population in an economy depended on agriculture. We have earlier mentioned that Tantrism developed in an agrarian society basically as a fertility cult, and for these reason the religious *Sadhanas* of Tantrism is more body centric and thus obviously female participation in the Tantra *sadhana* became the prime concern in Tantrism. This is why *sexual act* with female has been treated as an inseparable part of this philosophy since its inception.

In agrarian economy traditionally *fertility rites* are considered as religious rituals that “reenact, either actually or symbolically, sexual acts and/or reproductive processes: “sexual intoxication is a typical component of the...rites of the various functional gods who control reproduction, whether of man, beast, cattle, or grains of seed. This could be the reason, for which in *Sadhana* of this land is more *sexually* oriented women centric avoiding all kinds of Vedic sermons and rituals. It is stated in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics that ‘In the popular knowledge and belief they have practically superseded the Vedas over large part of India. In all these writings (Tantric writings) female principle is personified and made prominent to the almost total exclusion of the male”. ((Wikipedia 2017).

However, also some cultic religions emerged in mediaeval Bengal which consciously avoided female *Sadhan Sangi* or female assistance while performing religious rituals. The followers of these religions themselves used to practice their *Sadhana* by thinking themselves as women by putting out mind from their male existence. R.G. Bhandakar by exploring the connection of this thought in *Shakta Sadhana* mentioned, “The ambition of every pious follower of the system (sakta) is to become identical with *Tripura-Sundari*, and one of his religious exercises is to habituate himself to think that he is a woman. (Shahjiya, a religious cult. Gaudiya Discussion Archives. p.1). *Sadhana* in Sahajiya cult is also similar as well. Monindramohan Bose stated, “The Sahajiyas also believe that at a certain age of spiritual culture, “man should transform himself into a woman and remember that he cannot have the experience of true love so long as he cannot realize the nature of woman in him” (Ibid). Tantrism, as an ancient philosophy thus could partly be identified as part of the Lokayata philosophy of the lower class population and also is the mother of our all cultic religions. It also has had certain influence on the mainstream religions too. Shashibhushan Dasgupta observed; “Tantrism is neither Buddhist nor Hindu in origin, it seems to be religious under-current, originally independent of any abstruse metaphysical speculation flowing on from obscure point of time in religious history of India, with these practices and yogic process, which characterize Tantrism as a whole, different philosophical, or rather theological systems got closely associated in different time. . . . . These esoteric practices (yogic) when associated with the theological speculation of the Saivas and Saktis, have given rise to Saiva and Sakta Tantrism, when associated with Buddhistic speculations have given rise to the composite religious system of Buddhist Tantrism, and again, when associated with the speculation of Bengal Vaisnavism the same esoteric practices have been responsible for the growth of the esoteric Vaisnavite cult, known as Vaisnava Sahajiya movement. (Dasgupta. ibid).

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### **7.3.1.5 Buddhist Sahajiya Movement**

Buddhism was founded in northeastern India by Prince Siddhartha Goutam of Kapilavastu in the sixth century B.C. Having achieved enlightenment he became known as Buddha or enlightened. Buddha preached a path of salvation to his followers. His preaching denies existence of any supernatural power controlling human existence or it depends on any supreme deity. Its earliest form was based on Buddha's teaching and moral code and stressed that everyone, through

concerted individual efforts and actions, could enlighten himself. (Origins of Buddhism. Center for Global Education. Asiatic society 2016).

During 7<sup>th</sup> century AD major theological ferment occurred in India resulting in the emergence of a system of esoteric dogma. Far removed from the original teachings of Buddha, these new doctrines were complex. Combining elements of Buddhism and Hindu beliefs with necromancy—that is, sorcery involving spirits of the dead—mystical symbolism, and magical rites these doctrines appeared in the scenario of Buddhist religious arena. This form of Buddhism came to be known as Tantrism. “By providing deities like Bodhisattvas with female counterparts, Tantrism greatly expanded the Buddhist pantheon. New cosmological systems promoted the use of diagrammatic mandala paintings, while local shamanistic beliefs and terrifying native deities were absorbed into the new religion. This system of Buddhism required that a guru or teacher, who already possessed strong spiritual powers, intercede to help followers transcend the material world and reach the desired state of nirvana (ibid).

Most probably, during Paul dynasty, Buddhism became infested with ritualistic and rite based canons. This resulted in the emergence of three different doctrines within Buddhism as sub-cults. These were Bajrajana, Kalchakrajana and Sahajana. (ibid). Though there were little differences in beliefs and practice by these sects, unity always prevailed among them. In short all these schools are called by modern scholars as *Shahajiya* or *Shahajyana* dharma. The moral preceptor of these schools is called '*Siddhacariya* (ibid).

The followers of *Shahajiya* cult believe in the “sahaja or simple way to feel the sahaja or innate reality that is present in every animate or inanimate object. (ibid. p. 9). According to Sahajiya philosophy, “along with an external form, every object also has an internal form. This internal form is ‘the eternal’, otherwise known as *Sahaja*. To feel the *Sahaja*, is to feel the internal eternity in one's self. The whole range of animate and inanimate objects can be felt by experiencing this internal form. The followers of this cult think that a simple, direct way is the best means to experience this feeling. What goes in favor of human nature is the *Sahaja* (simple) and what goes counter to it is *Vakra* (crooked); (Majumdar, R.C. P. 45). The attainment of the self through in accordance with human nature is the objective of Sahajiya philosophy. The Sahajiya believe that the object of worship is knowledge, and this knowledge resides within the self, not outside of it. They believe that this knowledge cannot be acquired through study and books, but only apprehended through the advice of preceptors and the indoctrination of Sahaja

Sadhana. The Sahajiya emphasizes the importance of the body. They believe that the body embodies the universe and attainment of the self can only be made through bodily love. Literature based on Sahajiya philosophy is classified as Sahajiya literature.

It is said that in total 84 Siddhacharya were born in Bengal in between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. (ibid). These Siddhacharyas composed many verses in early Bengali prakrit language. In these verses metaphysical truth of Buddhism were depicted. These writings contained valid criticism of *Vedic* rituals, Puranic sacrifices and descriptions of Jaina and Buddhist followers. It is very surprising to note that remarks of Shahajiya commentators are similar to modern western criticism of Hinduism. It is supposed that this modernism of opinions and impartial judgments of these doctrines helped *Shahajiya* ideas to become popular among the common people of that period. “It is evident that, the total collection of images and epigraphs received till now of the whole Pal period depict the influence of Puranic culture and religion upon the people. But the historical truth is Puranic culture only was limited to the rich, educated and elite class of people in the society; whereas *Shahajiya* religion was current among the lower class people of the society.( ibid). It is known from the songs (Doha) of ‘Sarah’, one of the Siddhacharya that they lodged strong protests against the superiority of Brahmins. They were also able to abolish the caste system from their community; this was the reason, why *Shahajiya* cult became popular among the down trodden people of the society.

The credit for transforming Buddhism invariably goes to the people of ancient Bengal. (ibid). They helped to give a new shape of Buddhism that influenced the other religions of Bengal and Bihar and brought about revolutionary changes in the moral consciousness of the people and their social life. Later the Bengalis failed to retain this great ideal of life due to moral degradations, lack of self control and indiscipline that took the realm of life of the people of Pala Kingdom. The ideology always claimed praises from scholars abroad. (ibid). Later in the development of Baulism in Bengal, Shahajiya movement had immense influence. Body centric cultic philosophy of Shahajiya was absorbed by the Bauls with same objective and spirit.

#### **7.3.1.6 Sufi-ism**

Historically Arabic word *Taş awwuf* has been used to identify the practice of *Sufis*. Mainstream scholars of Islam define *Tasawwuf* or *Sufism* as the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam which is supported and complemented by outward or exoteric practices, such as Sharia. (What is Sufiism? The Threshold Society P. 1).



Sufism is considered as a way of life, through which “a deeper identity is discovered and lived. Beyond the already known personality, the deeper identity is in harmony with all that exists. This deeper identity, or essential self, has abilities of awareness, action, creativity and love that are far beyond the abilities of the superficial personality. Eventually it is understood that these abilities belong to a greater life and being which we individualize in our own unique way while never being separate from it” (ibid).

As an experience; a way of life rather than a doctrine or a belief system, Sufiism is a tradition of enlightenment that carries the essential truth forward through time. As such, Sufi tradition is to be conceived in a vital and dynamic sense. The Philosophical expression of Sufism should not be explained in terms of religious and cultural forms of the past. The truth of Sufism requires reformulation and fresh expression in every age. “Reformulation does not mean that Sufism will compromise its challenge to a stubbornly materialistic society. It is and will remain a critic of “worldliness” — by which it is meant everything that causes us to be forgetful of the Divine reality. It is and must be a way out of the labyrinth of a secular, commercial culture. Most importantly, however, it is an invitation to meaningfulness and well-being (ibid).

Sufism, as we know it, developed within the cultural matrix of Islam. The Islamic revelation presented itself as the expression of the essential message brought to humanity by the prophets of all ages. The Qur’an recognizes the validity of 124,000 or 224,000 prophets or messengers who have come to awaken us from our selfish egoism and remind us of our spiritual nature. The Qur’an confirmed the validity of past revelations, while asserting that the original message was often distorted over the course of time. (ibid).

#### **7.3.1.6.1 Basic Tenets of Sufism**

Primarily, Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism. It emphasizes central aspects of the Islamic tradition. Based on this, Sufi-ism seeks to cultivate an experience of ultimate unity or oneness with the divine. It points at two important features of Sufism – one doctrinal and the other practical. The twelfth-century Andalusian mystic Ibn al-Arabi clearly elaborated the ‘notion of oneness in his concept *wahdat al-wujud* (‘oneness of being’). “The basic premise of this doctrine is that all created things are essentially reflections of God and that therefore God (or Truth – *al-Haqq*) is present in all things in this world. (ibid). This notion can be termed as a kind of pantheism. This idea is considered as showing of an apparent disrespect to the transcendence of the Divine. It thus became a main point of tension with normative Islam during its flourishing

period. “In other words, there are complex theological doctrines within Sufism, making the doctrinal-experiential differences difficult to render in any straightforward manner. (ibid).

The second component is the practical dimension or the spiritual techniques for experiencing the divine. “This might be called the ethical ‘technologies of the self’ (to borrow a term from Foucault).”(ibid). In the former, Sufis primarily practice *sama*. This is a “ritualistic practice of ‘audition’ that generally involves the recitation of poetry, the invocation of the names of God (*jikir*), and rhythmic bodily movements performed in groups that lead people to an ecstatic experience in which one experiences the dissolution of the self in the face of the Divine. (Mafizul. K. P. 52). The emphasis on community can then be connected to the formation of Sufi orders called “*tariqat* (sing. *tariqa*), which in many ways defined classical or medieval Sufism. The *tariqa* is named after a particular founding saint or ‘friend of God’ (*wali Allah*) who often gains his/her status through esoteric knowledge, performing miracles (*karamat*), receiving God’s blessing (*baraka*), and a spiritual genealogy (*silsila*). (ibid). Individuals then could enter into discipleship with these types of figures who guide the apprentice along his/her spiritual path, and the group of disciples that enter into this relationship constitute a particular manifestation of the *tariqa* at a given time, though at any point in history an order can be removed from the founding figure. (ibid). Some contemporary scholars have argued that, especially in the modern context, the *tariqa* has ceased to function as it did in the pre-modern times and that therefore modern Sufism has taken on such a distinct character that it is possible now to speak of ‘Neo-Sufism’ (ibid). Besides details of this debate and the utility of the term, it does point to the question of how Sufism articulates with discourses of modernity. For instance, are Sufi practices and beliefs commensurate with the sensibilities of modern Muslim life? However that is subject to analysis. The relationship between Islam and modernity is a significant question posed by scholars of Islam. Sufism provides a useful focal point for these studies, but the issue related to the discussions of the communal constitution of Sufism, is central to how we define Sufism, and therefore an attempt to articulate what Sufism is ought to include the topics of sainthood and *tariqa*, in addition to individual experience. (ibid).

A prevalent tendency among the western scholars is to think Sufism as a kind of individualized or more private form of Islam. The representation of Sufism as a form of ‘peaceful Islam’ or as a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of radical Islam is equally pervasive. (Green 2012. P. 72). In this context, “Sufism is presented as both a political and peaceful, and is therefore a non-threatening

method for confronting extremism. However, many of these formulations of Sufism de-contextualize it and overlook the facts that the Sufi groups have initiated and had been intimately involved in various militant movements throughout history. For example, early Sufis in Bengal were often the ‘frontiersmen’ of Islam, bringing a new religion into hostile Hindu territories and were therefore forced to participate in military conquests. (Mafizul. K. P. *ibid*). More recently, Sufi leaders sparked many anti-colonial movements and the *tariqa* system was used as a recruiting mechanism. Examples can be found throughout the Islamic world. In Bengal early Sufi saints fought against the feudal nobilities including various kings to protect the mass people from the wrath of the elites. These could be termed as prime examples of what Milani called ‘militant Sufism. (*ibid*). It is in this sense the statement that, ‘Sufism is a paradox’ could be explained.

Sufism confounds our thought in a number of different ways. It is said to promote peace and tolerance, yet has often been deployed in contexts of violence and militancy. It is claimed to be a political and disinterested in worldly affairs, yet Sufi orders have held tremendous economic and political power throughout history. (*ibid*). It claims to be Islamic, yet Sufis have continually been criticized as un-Islamic by Muslims. “Sufism promotes a kind of universality, yet the myriad forms of Sufism emerged from within specific cultural contexts and retain that cultural character. It is often seen as an esoteric tradition, yet for many centuries was considered ‘popular religion.’ Finally, it emphasizes the individual’s relationship to the Divine, yet this experience is made possible through bodily practices and involvement in a community” (Kugle 2007, Bashir 2011.) These tensions, however, provide “incredibly fruitful areas for both historical and ethnographic investigation because it is precisely how individuals and groups navigate these tensions at particular places and times that will enable us to speak about how the different forms of Sufism connect with one another. Such investigations will also give us a better sense of the enduring impact of Sufism on the Islamic landscape as a whole and allow us to better understand the processes through which visions of normative Islamic identity are constructed” *Ibid*).

#### **7.3.1.6.2 Sufi Influence in Bengal**

One of the reason for the rapid spread of Islam during medieval period in the Indian subcontinent of which Bengal was a part, could be attributed to the spiritual and humane influence of Sufism. In particular, Sufi saints played a great role in creating a predominantly Muslim influenced Bengal province. Specifically the eastern Bengal was a fertile field for the spread of Sufi ideas in Indian sub continent. The simple life and living of the early Sufis based on *Sharia*, made them legendary examples of simplicity, piety and devotion that influenced millions of peoples who belonged to the lowest stratum of population to come close to the Sufis. Being influenced by their life, a large number of these hapless people in course of time had accepted Islam as their religion. The Sufis in Bengal, in the quiet atmosphere of their *khanqahs* in places accessible to all people not only catered to the spiritual and mundane needs of the socially and economically exploited people, but also Sufis stood besides the poorer segments of the society and fought against the rulers to protect the rights of theirs. These pro people attitudes of the Sufis were in general responsible for the rapid spread of Islam among the mass population. (Mafizulla K. P. *ibid*). This view has been supported by the fact that after the first Census of India in 1872, it was revealed in the census that Bengal was inhabited by a large number of Muslims who constituted 48 percent of total population. (*ibid*). The census report led to a great controversy regarding the question of the origin of this large number of Muslims in Bengal. Beverly was of the opinion that the reason of the presence of so many Muslims in the remote corners of Bengal was 'not due to so much to the introduction of Mughal blood into the Country as to the conversion of the former inhabitants. 'Mr. Abdul Karim in his Social History of Muslims in Bengal Chapter III also recognized conversions as an important factor in the spread of Islam in Bengal, in which process the role of Sufis was an important factor than the Muslim rulers and scholars. The untiring zeal and selfless devotion of the early Sufis of Bengal was to a very large extent instrumental not only in the spread of Islam in Bengal especially in the outlying areas which were away from the centers of political activities but also their liberal outlook helped in changing the mindset of the general population heavily burdened with economic hardship and religious bigotry.

#### **7.3.1.6.3 Influence of Sufism on Baul sect**

We have mentioned earlier that the Bauls of Bengal have rich unorthodox devotional tradition, which has been influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. At the same time Baul tradition has distinct differences from all the three religious doctrines. “The Bauls tradition is eclectic; its

influences come from tantric (Sahajiya) Buddhism, tantric Hinduism (primarily Vaisnava Sahajiya, Saiva-Sakta, Bengali (Gaudiya) Vasinavism, and Sufi Islam. (ibid). Bauls were defiant sect against all social constraints, such as the caste system, which leave them free to achieve liberation through the realization of the Divine like Sufi saints used to do. Like Sufi doctrine, in the Baul religion individual inquiry and emphasis on the person's physical body are regarded as important, because it is within the body and the Supreme resides and thus it is the only place people need to search for the Supreme. The basis of Baul ideology is like Sufi ideals, to achieve the spiritual objective of liberation. Like Sufis, songs are part of their religious rituals and consider songs as invaluable to the maintenance and preservation of their religion. Songs were used for instruction by the guru to teach his disciple and to prepare him for the ultimate truth. The goals, of the Baul practitioner, are to achieve the realization of the Supreme using both yogic and tantric techniques.

According to Islam, caste or one's birth does not limit a person from spiritual development or from the quest of the spiritual attainment. The poorer segment of the society had no such right to perform in a caste based society of Indian sub continent. Sufis preached this ideological doctrine in protecting the rights of the subaltern population of the land who were for long had been under severe social and political subjugation of the ruling elites. The Bauls share the social outlook of the *Sufis*. They reject the conventional norms, the hierarchical social order and the spiritual authority of the *Brahmins*. *Sufism* lays stress on finding a teacher who has the assent of another master to impart knowledge. The *Bauls* also believe that one needs a *guru* to show the light of truth. A guru can lead the ignorant follower and explain the secrets of yogic practices. It is an unbroken succession of teachers who impart and transmit the Divine Light, rather than worldly knowledge, from one generation to another. This could be one of the reasons why the Bauls, do not have any written precepts. All that we know of them, their philosophy and way of life, is what is handed down as practices. There are no codified or organized Baul scriptures. It is mostly an oral tradition where all teachings are handed directly from the teacher to the disciple, mostly through songs but also through discussions and yogic practices. One is not born a Baul, but becomes one, after initiation by a guru.

### 7.3.1.7 Nathism

Nathism is possibly the oldest religious cult that profoundly impacted the growth of Baul faith in Bengal. Scholars are of the opinion that Nathism is an amalgamation of esoteric Buddhist and the Shaivite cultic Sadhans. Shashibhushan Dasgupto remarked, “.....some take it to be essentially a crypto-Buddhist or an esoteric Buddhist cult, which later seceded from Buddhist fold and transformed itself into a Saivite cult.” On the other hand, some scholars also are of the opinion that the Nath cult is essentially a Saivite cult, which in course of its evolution, was assimilated within esoteric Buddhism and it is for this reason that we find in it hotchpotch of esoteric Buddhism and yogic Saivism” (Dasgupta. S. 1975. p. 92). Moreover, Dasgupta also mentioned that Nathism at the same time is believed to be an offshoot of a very ancient old faith the *Siddha cult*. This cultic faith emphasized on the psychosomatic process of yoga which is known as *Kaya Sadhana* applied for attaining an immortal spiritual life. It is quite difficult to have a unanimous opinion of the scholars in tracing the philosophical origin of Nathism in Bengal. However, some scholars also believe that Nathism borrowed its philosophical essence from the *Rosayana sashtra* or ancient ‘Chemistry’ practiced by the early Indian Chemists. In the *Sarva-darsana-samagra* of *Sayana-Madhara* it had been recognized as a branch of *Saivite* school of thought. *Rasayana* or the ancient method of dealing with Chemistry was said to be applied mainly for turning iron into gold and prevailed in different parts of the world from post-Christian era such as in Middle Eastern states it was known as Al Chemi. In India, based on the academic discourse of *Rasyana* a kind of theological speculation developed instead of dealing purely with its scientific texture. *Rasayana* was practiced for attaining *Siddhi* by making body immutable. This is the reason why, in the Nathism, *Rasayana* is considered as a process of making positive physical changes with the help of a psycho-chemical process and it is known as *Hatha-yoga*. (ibid).

The traditional concept about the founder of the Nath cult is that, one Matsendra Nath was the originator of Nathism. The followers of the cult also believe that Matsendra Nath was directly taught on Nathism or Nath-Yoga by no other than Lord Adi Nath. Lord Adi Nath was none but another name of Lord Shiva. Therefore Nathism, as its followers believe, was a derivative of Saivism and Nath people are primarily Saivait. But alongside; some prominent historians of Victorian period expressed that, Nathism originated from Buddhist Shahajiya cultic practices

(ibid. p.200). The Tantric Buddhist yogic practice developed with fundamental ideology of *Prajna* and *Upaya*. These are essentially the same tenets contained in Hindu Tantric philosophical view about Shiva and Shakti. In Hindu Tantric tradition it is believed that Shiva is the original instructor of all yogas. Similarly, Buddhist Tantric tradition adheres to *Lord Buddha* or *Lord Vajra-sattva* (or Hevjra, or Heruka) as the original instructor of all secret yogas. In Hindu tantric tradition *Adinath* or *Lord Siva* was the first 'Nath' in Nathic chronology, which was later, replaced by *Lord Budhdha* in Budhdhist Tantric beliefs as the original instructor of all yogic practices. It is mentionable that the most renowned Guru of Nath cult, Gorakhnath was a Budhdhist (ibid).

The Nath cult flourished in the hands of few prominent Nathas like Minanath, Matsyendranath, Goraksanath, Jalandhari and Cauranginath. They all were included in the list of Buddhist Siddhycaryas. These Nathas were often credited for their works on esoteric Buddhism. Later these works were translated in Tibetan language. (ibid.p. 201). On the contrary Dr. B.M Barua finds assimilation of *Ajivikas* with the Nath cult. *Ajivika* was one of the *nāstika* or *heterodox* schools of ancient Indian philosophy, and the ancient school of Indian fatalism. Purportedly founded in the 5th century BCE by Makkhali Gosala, it was a *Śramaṇa* movement and a major rival of early Buddhism and Jainism. *Ājīvikas* were organized group who formed discrete communities. (ibid. p. 231).

Barua narrated similarities between *Ajivikas* and Nath cult. According to him "In the Nathism of Bengal as in that of other places, one may trace the recrudescence and continuity of the doctrines and practices of the *Ajivikas*, who were a factor, as noted before in the religious history of Bengal. The points of similarities between the *Ajivikas* and the Nathas may briefly be noted thus:

- 1) "Both sects recognized three supreme Personalities in their religious tradition, the *Ajivikas*: Nanda-Vatsa, Krsa Samkrtyayana and Maskarin Gosala; while among the Nathas: Mina-nath, Matsyendra-nath and Goraksa-nath are prominent.
- 2) "Both sects admitted singing and dancing as two important modes of religious expression.
- 3) "Both sects believed that in order to reach the human state a soul must pass through eighty four hundred thousand stages.

- 4) “Both aspired after *Ananta-manasaor Sahasrara* as the highest condition of soul reachable through Hath-yoga, in which Pranayam or control of the vita wind is the essential feature.
- 5) “Both were Caturangis (*Caurangis*) in the sense that their religious life was to stand the fourfold test of ascetics, viz. *Parama-tapassita*, (great privation), *parama-lukhata* (great austerity), *parama-jeguchhita* (great loathness to wrong-doing), and *parama-pavivittata* (great aloofness from the world). (ibid. p. 200).

Shashibhushan Dasgupta did not agree with Dr. Barua on the point that Nathism had developed under the nourishment of *Ajivikas*. He stated “In criticism of the view of Dr. Barua we may say that though there may be some important points of similarity in some of the views, practices and traditions of the *Ajivikas* and the *Nath Siddhas*, there seems to be no similarity in their theological speculations.” The *Ajivikas* were indeed wandering saints, who would often have recourse to some of the important Hatha-Yogic practices; but these Hath-Yogic practices were no monopoly of any particular religious sect; they were and still are important factors in the practical aspect of many of the Indian religious systems. It is a particular theological system growing round these important Hatha-Yogic practices that have given distinctiveness to nathism as a religious sect. the tenets of the *Ajivikas* are not yet clearly known; but as far as they are known, they do not seem to represent any close resemblance with the speculations of the *Nath Siddhas*. (ibid. p. 201).

However, from our earlier discussion it can be concluded that Tantraism played a key role in the emergence of all cultic religions of Bengal and also in other parts of India. Even the mainstream religions like Hinduism and Buddhism also adhered to Tantraism for their religious discourses. All the yogic practices in different cultic religions are nothing but the philosophical offshoot of Tantrism. Therefore, we may say that neither Buddhism nor Hinduism played the key role in the emergence of folk based cult religions rather it was Tantrism that basically helped in blooming of the folk religions in Bengal and so to the Nathism.

The principal goal of the *Nath-Siddhas* is to attain the Shivahood as well through their Hath-Yogic *Sadhana* they want to achieve that. The followers practice different types of *Sadhanas* of which *Ulta-Sadhana* or the Regressive process and *Kaya Sadhana* are mention-worthy. By these *Sadhanas* followers of Nath cult try to attain the power of escaping death as well as the attainment of liberation from mundane life.



*Ulta Sadhana* or regressive process is a special *Sadhana*. Followers of Nath cult believe that such yogic practice could lead the *Siddhas* or the practitioners towards immortality. *Ulta Sadhana* means a process to control over the physical, biological and psychological process by setting a regressive motion in them through a slow and gradual process of yoga. Because of this regressive nature of the *Sadhana*, the language of the songs by which the secret of the *Sadhana* is spelled is also extremely paradoxical and enigmatic. The process has also been explained under the imagery of proceeding against the current (*Ujana sadhana*). (ibid. p.231).

On the other hand, *Kaya-sadhana* is more body centric. Followers practice this process by considering two nerves of the body in the right and left as the sun and moon. While the left nerve as moon reproduces the elements of *Rasa* or *Soma* and similarly the right nerve as sun reproduces the elements of fire. This is the reason why the Naths called this body as the product of *Agni* and *Soma*. The *Rasa* or *Soma* is considered as food and *Agni* or fire and is considered as the *bhakkok* (consumer). It is believed that through a proper combination of the consumer and consumed the whole creation is being sustained. It is mentionable that, often the Sun and the Moon are assumed by the Nath followers as the symbol of Male and Female being in their cultic *Sadhanas*. Shashibhushan Dasgupta says, ‘The sun and the moon as *Agni* and *Soma* respectively are manifested in physical world as the seed of father and the ovum of mother, through the combination of which proceeds the visible body, as thus *Agni* and *Soma* are the two primordial elements of which whole creation is made.(ibid. p. 236).

The Naths do practice Hatha-yoga and *Kaya Sadhana* (culture of the body) for keeping their body fit, perfect and immutable and thereby attaining an immortal spiritual life. The Naths, belong to a lower caste or *Shudra* and basically they are the Hindu weavers by profession in rural Bengal, and are often called as *yugi*. These yogic practices of the Nathism had intruded in Baul cultic rituals. The Bauls as mentioned earlier thus owes greatly to Nathism for flourishing as a folk cultic religion of rural Bengal.

#### **7.3.1.8 Vaisnava Sahajiyaism**

Vaishnava-Sahajiya is a form of Tantric Vaishnavism. It is an esoteric movement clad in Hindu religious rituals and was centered in Bengal. It sought religious experience through the world of the senses, specifically through sexual love. The Vaishnava-Sahajiyas for long had been looked down by other religious groups in Bengal.

Though the seeds of Vaishnava Shahajiya movement were sown in Bengal during 14<sup>th</sup> century AD but actually it surfaced as a cult movement in 17<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and in some other parts of India. *Sahaja* (Sanskrit: “easy” or “natural”) as a system of worship was prevalent in the Tantric traditions common to both Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengal. The divine romance of Krishna and Radha was celebrated by the poets Jayadeva (12th century), Chandidas, and Vidyapati (mid-15th century), and parallels between human love and divine love were further explored by Sri Chaitanya, a 15th–16th-century mystic, and his followers. The Vaishnava-Sahajiya movement gained momentum from the 17th century onward as a synthesis of these various traditions. (ibid. p. 67). Vaisnava sahajiya movement in Bengal brought a revolutionary change in the Buddhist Sahajiya cultic practices by transforming the prevalent tantric practices of it into *parakiya-rati* (literally, “the love of a man for a woman who legally belongs to another”) above *svakiya-rati* (conjugal love) as the more intense of the two. *Parakiya-rati*, is said to be felt by avoiding the norms of the society or for personal gain and thus was more analogous to divine love. Radha is conceived as the ideal of the *parakiya* woman, and the Vaishnava-Sahajiyas never attempted (as did some sects of Vaishnavism) to depict her as the wife of Krishna. Because of the extreme privacy of the movement, little is known about its prevalence or its practice today.

Vaisnava Sahajiya philosophy has a considerable literary works to its credit. It is needless to say that it was Vaisnava Sahajiya which brought a vigorous literary trait in medieval Bengal which partially was humanitarian, and paved the way for the emergence of humanitarian philosophy in Bengal. This literary works proclaimed the highness of mankind above all things. Chaṅ ḍ idās and to some other poets like Vidyāpati, Rūpa, Sanātana, Vṛ ndāvana-dāsa, Kṛ iṣ ṇ a-dāsa Kavirāja, Narahari, Narottama, Locana, Chaitanya-Dāsa are note-worthy names of Vaisnava literature. The Vaishnava Shahajiya literature deliberately employed a highly enigmatic style in its literary description.

The Vaishnava-Sahajiya school sought religious experience through the five senses which included human coupling and sexual love. The vaishnava Shahajiya tradition used the epic romance between Krishna and Radha as a metaphor for union with God. It sought to experience that union through its physical reenactment. It teaches that the ideal way to understand the union of humanity is to transcend the profane aspects of sexual intercourse and experience it as a divine act.

The Vaisnava-Sahajiya creed is a synthesis of these various traditions. The Vaisnava-Sahajiyas operated in secrecy, because, their sexual tantric practices were viewed with marked disdain by other religious communities. In their literature they adopted an enigmatic style employing substitutions and correspondences that has come to be known as illusive (Sanskrit: *saṁdhyā-bhāṣā*). Little is known about their prevalence or practices.

In performing their rituals members of this lineage form a circle termed as Ganachakra (Sanskrit) and carry out dances by chanting the name of Krishna which is known as Krishna Shankirtan or as Rasa-lila of Krishna. It is a mystic religious rites, and the followers participate in the rites for communion, trance-possession, and non-difference or non-duality with 'deity' (Sanskrit: *ishtadevata*). This process of performing rituals was an amalgamation of Sufi religious performance of religious rituals.

Shashibhushan Das Gupta remarked in his book 'Obscure Religious Cult...' 'The Sufistic ideas that were thus introduced (by Muslim Sufi since the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> century) were soon assimilated with the prevalent Sahajiya ideas the result of this amalgamation has been the Baul of Bengal. Now we show the philosophical chronology of the emergence of Baul cult with a diagram which will specify the historical and philosophical Vaishnava Shahajiya al trend of Baulism. (ibid).

## 7.4 Conclusion

Thus, in conclusion it can be said that, Baulism is the amalgamation of different philosophical offshoots and different *Sadhanas*. At the same time it also should be indicated that it is Sahajiya cult, mentionably Visnava Sahajiya cult which exerted more influence in the emergence of Baulism as a separate school of *Sadhana*-based folk cult. Through a long process of evolution, the *Sahajiya* practice of different religious trait developed along with the practice and experience of day to day life of very common people of the lower strata of the society. These were basically the offshoot of different indigenous cults, culture and ritualism. Baulism thus could be termed as an intermixture of different ingredients of the beliefs and practices of the lower class population of the society in the form of a religious cult movement in rural Bengal. This is the reason why in Baul *Sadhana* and in its way of life, one can observe the blend of different practices and *Sadhanas* of different cults and religious beliefs. In spite of this fact, Baulism in its core essence, no doubt is totally a different and separate cultic religious belief. Shashibhushan Dasgupta remarked, "... the earlier *Sahajiya* cult underwent a notable transformation in the hands of Bauls; for the Bauls, by derivation and innovation effected a great change both in the ideology and practice of the *Sahajiya*. .... The Buddhist Sahajiya conceived 'Sahaja' as Maha-Sukha which is the unity of the duality represents by man and woman as 'upaya' and 'prajna'. The method for the realization of this 'Sahaja' consisted therefore essentially in a sexo-yogic practice. However, the Vaisnavsa supplied the element of love. In the Vaisnava School, as well in 'Sahaja' sadhana love is conceived as supreme which can be realized only by the union of Krishna and Radha who reside in the corporal form of man and woman.... But the Bauls conceived 'Sahaja' as the innermost external Beloved who is the man of heart (Maner Manush). The Bauls also speak of love and union but this love means the love between the human beings and the Divine. In this human being realizes his union with the Divine. In other words he merges his personal existence with the divine the beloved that resides within his body temple. Sufism has the great influence on the Bauls in evolution of this new conception of 'Sahaja' and in the difference in their religious approaches.

Therefore, in conclusion, we may say that, though Baulism is an amalgam of the different philosophies and cultic practices, but it is not an offshoot of any specific philosophical school or practices. Baul is therefore, not mere an adjective of Bengali dictionary, it has separate entity, an entity of a religion, the religion of Bengal.

Baulism like other religious cult also practiced differently by its different devotees. The literary meaning of 'Baul' refers to psychologically crippled people of the society. But Baulism as philosophy and cult indicates a group of people who seek divine freedom of human life. The main message of this philosophy is to love fellow human beings. This philosophy disclosed 'God lives within the human soul' and as such one can reach god by serving humanity only. According to Baul believers only he could be considered as Baul who believes in humanism and who believes that nowhere but it is in this human body where God dwells. So a Baul is none but a believer who offer his worships to Human Guru leaving all speculative ideology and religion. Duddu Shah, the principal disciple of Lalon Fakir wrote in one of his songs,

*Je khunje manushe khoda sei to Baul*

*Bastute Iswar o Allah*

*Khunje pai tar ul.*

*Purbo punor janam na mane*

*Chakhhu na dei anumane*

*Manush bhoje bortomane*

*Haire kobul.*

*Ved Tulshi Mala tepa*

*Asob tara bole dhoka*

*Saitane diye dhappa*

*Saab korai bhul.*

*Manushe sakali mele*

*Dekhe shune Baul chale*

*Din Duddu tai bole*

*Lalon Sainjir kul.*

### **Translation**

He who searches God in human

Can be considered as a Baul

God's existence is within the matter

There He can be found.

He does not accept the theory

Of the cycle of rebirth  
And does not believe in hypothecation  
He bestows his worships to man  
With firm belief leaving doubt and confusion.  
They disprove all the sermons of Vedas  
And all rituals like counting breeds  
They consider it as ill practices  
And as provocation of devils.

One may get everything within this man  
Baul believes none other thing but this truth  
Wretched Duddu proclaims it with firm faith  
On behalf of Lalon Sain the great.

One needs not have to follow different religions and rituals to reach God. To a Baul, human-mind is a more holy place than that of Mosque, Temple, Pagoda, Church or a Synagogue. Human mind is the place cultivating in which one can reach closer to God. As such, Bauls do not offer their worship and prayer to any super natural power rather they completely surrender to human Guru. Bauls do not believe in past life, rebirth and in an invisible all powerful God. Bauls do not hanker after any afterlife reward but they try utmost to make their living joyous and meaningful in the present life.

Thus it can be said that, whatever meaning the word Baul contains, as a cultic philosophy it has a significant inner meaning which being a syncretism of different cults and philosophies and it has its own significant uniqueness. Therefore, we must conceive Baul philosophy in totality.

## CHAPTER 8

### Baul Tatta : An Overview.

#### 8.0 Introduction

Baulism as a cult movement is based on ten tattas or premise. These are Dehatatta (mysticism of body), Atma tatta (Self-revelation), Manush Tatta (Human revelation), Guru Tatta (Guruism), Nabi Tatta (Prophetism), Sreesti Tatta (theory of Creation), Param Tatta (Theory of Supreme being ), Gour Tatta (Gourism ), Sadhan Tatta ( Theory of Austerity) and Nur Tatta (Enlightenment ). Among these Tattas or premise, Deha Tatta, Manush Tatta, Atma Tatta and Guru Tatta are the most significant. Though apparently it appears that Bauls interpret all their Tattas from mystic point of views, but at the end analysis all these Tattas turn out to be more practical in nature having sociological significance rather than that of mystic. In the following passages I attempted to portray features of the four main tattas or premise of Baulism based on which other tattas evolved.

#### 8.1 Deha Tatta

Bauls consider human body as a microcosm, the most mysterious creation in this universe. Bauls also believe that, human body is like a holy place of worship, in which the most treasured one dwells. This is why Bauls say, people do many things for receiving the blessings of God. For getting closer to God they perform pilgrimage to different holy places in vain. People look for the Divine one (Soul) in temples, mosques or in other religious institutions. But they fail to understand that the divine one (Soul) dwells inside the holiest place on earth; the body temple of human beings. Bauls believe that human body is holier than that of any religious places. Bauls also believe that their body is the supreme adobe of the Soul. They consider ‘Soul’ as the principal part of this body and it is responsible for conscious of the human body. For the Bauls, this body is an object and the soul is the subject. This is the reason the Bauls put all efforts to keep their body on top form for the dwelling of the soul. For keeping the body fit, they practice the Yogic breath control technique. The technique of controlling breathing is a very ancient one, and is a mystic process of body exercise. In Encyclopedia of Islam it is stated that, ‘the concept of breath figures prominently in the development of thought process in many religions. *Egyptian Ka*, Hebrew nefesh and ruah, Greek Psuche and Pneuma, Latin anima and spiritus, Sanskrit Prana, Chinese Ch’i Polynesian mana and Iroquotian oreda, all demonstrate that the theme of

breath has had a major place in man's quest for religious understanding. Moreover, theological conception of breath control had led many of the world's traditions to feature respiratory exercise in their religious disciplines, especially in Asia and among groups influenced directly or indirectly by practices from the Indian sub-continent. (Dimock. A. 1966. p. 52). In Greek philosophy this process of controlling the breath for sound dwelling of the soul could also be found. In some pre-Socrates philosophical schools the mentions of controlling breathing for better health were found. (ibid).

Bauls believe that all elements, by which this universe is created, do exist within human body where Soul dwells within. A popular Baul saying is, 'whatever is present in the universe is present in this body.' We can find the echo of this utterance in all religious philosophy of all eras and may be for this reason; human body has been considered as the holy subject in all religions. The main message of Baul philosophy is, 'the ultimate liberty of human life lies within this human body'. Baul believe that, since 'Soul' resides within the body as such this body becomes endowed with consciousness. Soul is considered as a divine element in Baul cultic belief and without the existence of the soul this body is meaningless. Soul is not God, but is an element derived from God. As such Bauls believe, if someone is looking for reaching near to God, one should, at first, explore his or her own body, because without searching the 'Soul' within one's own body none can discern God.

### **8.1.1 Chari Cahndra Ved**

One of the important Deha Sadhanas (bodily practice) of the Bauls is the *Chari Cahndra Ved Sadhana*. In Baul rituals, there are the four elements with which human body is constituted. This belief is common for many other religions too. These elements are *Earth, Water, Air* and *Fire*. In Baul cultic belief, these principal elements with which the human body is constituted are known as the *Chari Chandra Ved* or four moons theory. In Sufi theology these are known as *Chhiya, Chhafed, Lal* and *Jarad*. These four elements have their inherent natural virtue. Sir Joan Woodroffe remarked, "According to Lokayata school of Indian materialism, mind should be considered as the result of chemical combination of the four forms of material substance- earth, water, fire and air in organic forms. (Karim. A. 2012. p. 227). In this context *Chari Chnadra ved* tatta could be described as early form of materialist thinking. Bauls view the human body as the outcome of four basic chemical elements. These elements at the same are the cause for the creation of animated substance; that is this body.



There is contradictory accounts about on *Chari Chandra Ved*. Some scholars mentioned earth, water, air and fire as the four moons, on the other hand some also defined stool (*Maal*), urine (*Mutra*), blood of Menstruation (*Raajo*) and semen (*Birja*) as elements of four moons. Upendranath Bhattacharjya mentioned *Maal*, *Mutra*, *Raajo* and *Birjo* as the four moons of Baul cultic rituals. Again some other scholars defined four states of mind as four moons. Hareshcahndra Paul is one of them, who said, “In search of the self when the mind reaches its fourth developed state, and the realization of self is about to be attained, there occurs the Chandra Ved (or splitting of the moons). (ibid).

Whatever differences exist among the scholars about the meaning of *Chari Chandra Ved*, for Bauls those are nothing but symbolic terms of the *Maal*, *Mutra*, *Raajo* and *Birjo*. Bauls put intense emphasis on *Chari Chandra Ved Sadhan* for attaining supreme power within their own body. Sometimes Baul followers term *Raajo* as the beauty, *Birjo* or semen as *Raasa* or time and *Raati* as the female semen. In symbolic language Bauls explain the *Maal* or stool as earth, *Mutra* or urine as water, *Raajo* or menstrual blood as fire and *Birjo* or semen as the air. The Bauls, as part of their cultic *Sadhana* consume all these four elements as a ritualistic practice. Through this practice Bauls believe, they could attain their ultimate goal. Bauls believe that no extract of human body is *Napak* (impure) for a *Sadhak*. They practice this *Sadhana*, because they believe if they take these four extracts of body, then a meaningful change would occur in them; they would be able to attain purest state of the body in Baul term.

*Chndra* is very popular term in *Baul Sadhana*. It usually indicates the extract of the body; but Bauls also term the ‘Soul’ as *Chandra*. Even they call female vagina as the secret moon (*Gupta Chandra*). Also Bauls try to explain everything that exists within human body as *Chandra*. This is why they explain ten fingers of hand as well as ten fingers of toe, two lips, tongue as *Chandras* and forehead as the half Chandra. Altogether they mention these parts of the human body as the ‘twenty four and half-moons.’ Moreover mouth, two breasts, two hands, two chests and naval are also explained as the eight moons, even sometimes they consider the left hole of nose as the *Chandra* (moon) as well.

In some cases, Bauls considers the Supreme Soul or God as the moon as well, and God is termed as *Purna Chandra* (full moon). Depicting God as *Purna Chandra* or Full Moon Bauls explained that God dwells within this body rather than that of the space. This moon is sometimes explained

as their *Maaner Maanush* (the man of heart) whose position is in the *Sahasrar* (the main part of the skull). He resides in the *Sahsrar* as the semen and during sexual intercourse this moon comes down as the *Dimbo*. The first fifteen days after menstruation period is regard as the *Shuklopaksho* and this particular period according to Baul ritual is the best time for the practicing *Sadhana* which is called *Shuvoyog*. If during this *Shuvoyog* (the best time) the breath of female mate passes through the left hole of nose, and right hole of the male mate, that is considered as the right time to have sexual relationship for attaining the *Atal Prapti* (retention). It is done by controlling their breath in process of *Pranayama*. In *Shuklopaksho* (the first fifteen days after menstruation) females desire for sexual intercourse increases and the probability rate of getting pregnant also becomes high. This is the reason Bauls (Sadhak and Sadhika) take very careful steps in sexual contact, so that due to their sexual intercourse female partner does not get pregnant. In Baul philosophy child bearing has been strictly prohibited because they believe producing children alienate the soul from the Supreme Being.

### **8.1.2. Raasa Sadhana**

Baul *Dehatattik Sadhan* is the *Akhando Sadhan*(un-segmented shadhana).Through this *Sadhana* Bauls desire to attain the fitness of their body and woman is considered as the main part of this *Raasa Sadhan*. The reason is, Bauls consider woman as the *Chetan Guru* (Preceptor of consciousness). For them, only women partner could help the Sadhak meaningfully in attaining the due success in their *Sadhana*. According to Baul belief, the success of Baul *Sadhana* principally depends on the mercy of woman. As such Baul *Sadhana* is mainly woman body centric.

For three day after the end of the menstruation period, a fluid is discharged from the vagina of a woman. This fluid discharges occur in three different colors i.e crystal clear, turbid and phlegm. The fluid discharge indicates the probability of women of becoming fertile. It means, if the vagina gets wet with discharge like phlegm then the probability of pregnancy becomes high and quite certain. And if it does not get wet then the probability reduces in a high scale. Therefore, if anybody does sex in this situation then the semen dies. It could be noted here that, the semen in the Baul cultic language is termed symbolically as fish and it is instructed to swim in the river meaning to engage in sexual act, when the river (vagina) is on the nimble current that means gets wet. In one of the songs by Lalon Fakir it is stated that,

*Samay bujhe badhal badhle na*

*Jaal shukale meen palabe*

*Pastabire bhai mona.*

*Tribeniro teer dhare*

*Meen rupe sain ghure phire*

*Tumi upor upor berao ghure*

*Se gavire duble na.*

*Maas onte mohajog hoi*

*Niras hote raas bhese jai*

*Koriye se jogger nirnai*

*Meen ruper khel dekhle na.*

*Jagatjora meen ovtar*

*Taar marmo ache sandhir upor*

*Siraj sain koi Lalon re tor*

*Sandhanike chinli na.*

### **Translation**

Why do you not build impediment in time

When the river will dry, fish will be scared out

Then you will be repented, O my mind.

In the bank side of *Tribeni*

*Sain* swims as the fish

You just set your net on upper layer

Not driving in the deep.

At the end of the month the tide comes

Then the nimble current overflows the bank

Not searching for that best timing

You do not see the game of that fish.

That fish as the *Avatar* mesmerizes the whole world

The secret of that fish is unknotted by the searching

Siraj, the master, says to Lalon

You do not care for your preceptor.

In the above song Lalon advised his disciples to go fishing in the tidal river so that every attempt for fishing could be successful. But, in dry-river everything will go in vain. Lalon says that the fish dives into *Tribeni* (the vagina) the confluence of the river, so for getting fish one should be very concerned in choosing proper timing. He (Lalon) also disclosed that the proper timing of fishing comes at the end of month which is the indication of that particular three days when vagina gets phlegm as its current. Thus before any sexual act, a true Baul will always examine the fluid of his female mate, keeping the fluid on a white colored cloth, because this could indicate when the fluid from his partner is in the form of phlegm. It is the highly preferred time for doing sex in desire for a child. In Baul philosophy losing semen without the purpose of reproduction is a great sin. Udasin Baul as per ritual is not permitted to lose semen without the purpose of reproducing child and this norm is strictly followed in Baul cult. But the fact remains, it is difficult for all Baul devotees to follow the canon. This is why, this canon is quite loose and it is allowed in very short span for the Grihi Baul to engage in sex, but it is strictly instructed not to lose semen without the purpose of reproduction.

Secondly, the *Sadhak* examines the taste of vaginal fluid for predicting the proper timing (*Mahajog*). The tastes of the vaginal fluid are of three different kinds. They are bitter and unpleasant, slightly salty and sweet. The sweet fluid is compared with honey in Baul ritual. The appearance of this sweet fluid is transparent and slick. It generates aromatic like lotus or Chandan tree. At this stage the fluid carries the probability of reproducing the holy child. Bauls also consider the look of the fluid as very vital because it represents the appearance of the God. During this particular time, a woman remains eager for engaging in sexual act and psychologically remains irksome. This may cause an unrest situation of mind among the woman and sometimes her body may produce mild aroma.

In Baul *Sadhana* as has been told earlier, participation of woman is very important. Without the participation of woman no one can perform any *Sadhana*. The *Raasa Sadhana* of the Bauls is impossible without woman's participation. An unmarried woman, in Baul term is regarded as the *Akhand*. That means the unmarried woman who did not have sexual experience and did not give birth to any child is the main part of their *Sadhana*. The fluid which flows after the very first menstruation of an unmarried woman is regarded as the *Sambhu Raasa*. Bauls as part of their *Raasa Sadhana* ritual, drink the same. According to their cultic belief, it increases the semen

power in a man and purify the body, as well as it helps a man to be free from all kinds of maladies and become physically fit.

The next of *Sadhana* is called *Uta Sadhana* in Baul term. In this stage *Sadhak* when engaged in sexual act with his *Sadhika* during the period of full moon, the *Sadhak* try to control ejaculation of semen by practicing *Pranayama* (controlling breath). This is a process, by which the *Sadhak* practice to attain *Karunya*, *Tarunya* and *Labonya Raasa*. In the practice of *Karunya Raasa Sadhana*, the votary attempts to pump up the semen to the brain through the vein *Ida*. When the *Sadhak* could do this *Sadhana* with due success, then he is blessed with blissful feelings of love.

Second stage is *Tarunya Raasa Sadhana*. When *Sadhak* become able to retain the ejaculation of semen, then he tries to push the semen upward. In the same way he tries to hold control of driving the semen downward in accordance of his wish through the vein *Pingola*. When the *Sadhak* could drive the semen downward, then it gets the force like water current and Bauls call it as *Tarunya Raasa*.

Third stage is the practice of *Labonya Raasa*. In this stage *Sadhak* becomes able to attain the power to pump up his semen through the veins *Ida*, *Pingola* and *Sushanma* according to his wish. This stage is the stage of supreme bliss for the *Sadhak* and he becomes able to attain this stage even without engaging in sex as well. By this practice of *Raasa Sadhana* both body and mind get freshness. This is why it is called *Labonya Raasa Sadhana*. The *Sadhana* of these *Karunya*, *Tarunya* and *Labonya* sometimes are considered as the stages of *Probarito*, *Shiddha* and *Sadhak* in Baul terminology.

At the end of the menstruation period, the vaginal fluid that comes out is called *Sreengar Raasa*. It is also known as the *Amrito Raasa*. According to Baul cultic beliefs this *Amrita Raasa* helps in increasing the time duration of sexual act. Bauls believe that taking of this *Raasa* as drink could enables a person for doing longer sexual act

A question naturally evokes here that, why mystic *Sadhana* of Baul cult in nature is so much body centric and sexual? For answering this question it can be said that, this sex oriented *Sadhana* is not limited to Baul cultic practice only, rather in almost all the cultic religions of the world, sex related rituals and *Sadhanas* are common features. This is mainly because sex is considered as symbol of fertility and many such rituals are related to crop production also. Secondly the followers of these minor cultic religions belong mainly to poor, wretched class, who has no other way of entertainment except sexual gratification. George Ryley Scott stated ‘...

in its purely metaphysical aspects; religion is indelibly and closely associated with sex. The connection between eroticism and mysticism which is so intimate a feature of the higher and more erotic religious feelings is specially pronounced. (Michael. F. 2001). Sex was a part and parcel of the mystic as well as materialistic *Sadhana* from ancient period and had been found in different ancient parts of the world. H. M. Westrop in his *Ancient Symbol Worship* mentioned, “Evident that this sexual worship extensively prevailed was to be found in many countries, both in ancient and modern times. It occurs in ancient Egypt, in India, in Babylon among the Assyrians, in Persia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Scandinavia and among the Gauls. (karim. A). Therefore it can be stated that existence of sex related ritual sand worship in ancient society was very much prevalent and its continuation even in modern time is remarkable.

The lower class population, in course of time turned this sex related acts as a ritual. Sometimes it also acts as a means of economic salvation. People of the lower stratum, due to their lowered social position, did never have a sound social and economic base on which they could sustain. This is one of the reasons, why they looked for the solution of their social and metaphysical problem through sex related *Sadhanas*. Because in sex-related *Sadhana* discouraged frequent intercourse which lessens more family member which at the same time act as reducing the threat of acute poverty.

As we have mentioned earlier that the lower class population of the society who remained socially and economically exploited and deprived, try to get emancipation from such inhuman condition. As a consequence they sought for the savior. Max Weber in his book titled *The Sociology of Religion* stated, “The lower social class, the more radical are the forms assumed by the need for the savior, once this has emerged. Hinduism provides an example of this in the *Karthabhajas*, a *Vaishnavite* sect that in common with many salvation sects, took most seriously the transcendence of the caste taboo. Members of this sect arranged for a limited commensality of their members on private as well as on cultic occasions. Essentially a sect of lower strata people, yet they earned the anthropolatric veneration of their heredity Guru to such a point that the cult became extremely exclusive. Similar phenomena can be found elsewhere among religions which recruited followers from the lower social classes. .. The transfer of salvation doctrines to the masses practically always results in the emergence of a savior, or at least in an increase of emphasis upon the concept of savior.” Thus, their endeavor for freedom from suppression and inhuman torture of the upper caste and class people, they sought means for both

social and spiritual salvation. This lower stratum population did not have the right to participate in any religious functions or to enter inside the religious institutions. This resulted in creating their own body centric mystic *Sadhanas*. This is the mystic interpretation of *Deha Tatta*. But the idea of *Deha Tatta* has more deep rooted meaning from sociological view point. Bauls are the impoverished people of the society. The only asset they have is their own body. For survival they need to keep the body fit and sound. If they fall sick, they won't be able to earn their livelihood neither they can seek proper medical help. Therefore, Bauls practice esoteric body centric mystic rituals to keep their body fit and sound, just not to gain spiritual goal only by unveiling the mystery of the body as is believed. Thus *Deha Tatta* to them is more important for their own survival than considering it as a mere philosophical issue.

## 8.2 Atma Tatta

Atma means self. 'Atma Tatta' is a means to explore the knowledge of thyself through which Bauls attempt to explore the capabilities of their own as human beings. The knowledge of Atmatatta is the knowledge of self as well as the knowledge of soul. It is believed almost in every religion and philosophy that this body is a chamber where there is a something (soul) which makes this body animated. Some philosophical ideas oppose it and questions the existence of any 'Soul'; such as in materialistic philosophy. But it is a general belief that this human body has got life because of the presence of 'Soul'. Greek philosopher Plato termed the soul as heavenly element of the body and he termed this 'Soul' by different names. The term Plato used for 'soul' include *Nous*, *Sama*, *Psyche* and *Genesis*. *Psyche* is the closest to a concept that incorporated with breath. For Palato, however, *Psyche* was designated as comprehensive personal soul, the divine aspects of man, that is the seat of rational intelligence and moral choice entirely separated from the body. (Hossain. A. I. 2015. p.313). In Indian philosophy, the 'Soul' is said as the independent being associated with the body. And in some cases especially in Tantric philosophy this 'Soul' is considered as an inseparable part of the body.

In Vedantic philosophy 'soul' is considered as independent and neutral phenomenon, which acts to animate the body but it is not responsible for the action of the body. Particularly in Vedantic philosophical school; this 'Soul' has been categorized in two types, such as (i) supreme soul and (ii) sentient. Supreme soul executes the sentient, but does not share the results of actions of sentient. In *Chhandogyo Upanishad* it is said, "the self (Atman) is free from all evils, it is eternal, immortal and beyond of all earthly desire, agonies and quality - it should be searched

out, one should desire to understand about it. Bauls, according to their cultic belief considers the soul as *Sonar Manush*, *Moner Manush* and *Achin Manush*. They compare this body as a cage where the soul resides and that soul is an unknown bird. Lalon Fakir in his songs used the term ‘cage’ and ‘Bird’ eloquently to compare the body and soul respectively as subject and object. Lalon Fakir symbolized human body as an unconscious phenomenon and soul as the conscious matter which enlivens the body consisting of eight chambers and nine doors. There is a meaningful *Storoto* or *Mnatra* or *Verse* on this philosophical idea in *Upanisada*. In the *Kothoponisada*, chapter 2 verse 3 it is said that,

*Atma nang rathinang sharirang rathamebo tu  
Buddhing tu sarathing biddhi maan: progrohomebo cha.’*

### **Translation**

This body is supposed to be like that of a chariot and the soul as the owner of that chariot, while wisdom is the driver and mind resembles as the rein.

In this verse, the soul is compared with a charioteer and the body is with the chariot. Mind of that charioteer is compared with the ray and the *Ripu* (instincts) of that chariot are meant as the horses. The chariot is carried by the horses-which are the instincts. The chariot can finally reach its destination when its horses are being well controlled. But if the horses remain beyond control that chariot will head towards definite destruction. Lalon repeatedly uttered in his lyrics about these uncontrolled horses and lamented about vulnerability of the chariot.

I have attempted here to explore the meaning and idea of *Achin Pakhi* or ‘Unknown Bird’ in the context of the mystic and materialist philosophies.

The Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers believed that human body is stimulated with a hazy gaseous substance which was considered as soul by them. But they did not specify whether this gaseous substance alone could stimulate the body or not? They agreed on the point that body is the container of the soul. That means without the body, the soul is meaningless. This idea manifests that the Soul alone is a passive force without the existence of the body. This thinking is comparable to that of the Charvaka thinkers of ancient India. Philosopher Heraclitus like other pre-Socratic philosophers believed that the soul is the part of a blazing fire.



The great Greek philosopher Socrates did not have any faith on Greek deities but he believed in the existence of 'Soul' as an immortal substance of the body that could not be diminished by the destruction of the earthly body. At his death bed by taking Hemlock, Socrates advised his weeping relatives 'do not cry, and always remember that death can destroy my body only but not the soul.' This indicates Socrates believed in the existence of 'soul' independent of the body.

In Sree Mott Bhagobad Geeta the same symphony could be found where body and soul were considered as separate phenomenon. In the chapter two; verses no 20 of Sree Mott Bhagobad Geeta it is said that,

*Na Jayete mriyote ba kodachinnayang bhutahbhobito ban a bhoyo*

*Ajo nityo shashwatohayong purano, na hanyete hanyemane sharire.*

### **Translation**

This soul cannot be created or destroyed. It changes forms Soul is eternal, and immortal. This body will decay but the soul will never.

It carries the meaning that this soul exists within the body as an independent being and therefore, it is stated that, this body is the medium of the manifestation of the soul. The Supreme Soul remains hidden in a sealed container. It wishes to manifest itself and so he created this universe. It is also stated in *Hadith-e Kudshi* that 'I was in the state treasure in a hidden container. I felt urge to become discernible and for that I created this universe. In the theory of creation this whole universe is His shadow and the different stages of his manifestation; is the different stages of evolution. Swami Gambhiranand says, "...the illusive state of Brahma is regarded as Ishwar. From this Ishwar absolute five properties had emerged and with these five properties this body is constituted. This absolute body was stated in Sutrata, *Hironnyogarvo* or life. He is alone regarded as wisdom, will, cause of action and the vessel of five properties. *SthuloPanchabhut* and *Shaptolokadi* (seven skies) had emerged from this *Shukkho Panchobhut* (absolute five properties). In this *Sthulo Biswo* (phenemonal world) this Being is regarded as the Supreme Being. All the universes are the part of His body". (Uponishad Gronthaboli. Karjalay. U. p. 15-16).The premise of atmatatta carries more sociological significance rather than mysticism.

As a cultural movement, Renaissance profoundly affected intellectual life in the early modern period of Europe. In the same way Baul philosophy also seemingly influenced the life and living of the rural impoverished population. The influence was felt in their day to day life during the period from 16<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. Baulism, like Renaissance movement, could be viewed as an attempt to study and improve the secular and worldly, both through the revival of ideas from the antiquity. Thus Baul philosophy of life helped people to explore their inner beauty and latent potentiality. In Baulism, 'Atma Tatta' could be termed as the symphony of renaissance. In Atma Tatta, God is portrayed as nothing but the inner force of human body and thus for Bauls, 'Atta' which means self is nothing but the manifestation of God.

'Atma Tatta' of Baulism has sociological significance rather than explaining the same as a mystic philosophy. As mentioned earlier, Bauls were and are still considered as the most indigent, wretched and untouchable class of the society and void of any rights to perform any ruling religions or worship any God, or to read any scriptures of the ruling class. This unfriendly situation made them conscious about the fact that they only have rights on their own self. This sully social atmosphere enkindled the Bauls to explore their own self, a process which helped them to discover their own potentiality for their freedom and survival in a hostile world. Thus for a Baul developing their own self is considered as most significant phenomenon.

### **8.3 Manush Tatta**

In Baulism '*Manush Tatta*' is considered as the most important part. The inner essence of Baulism is to defend and establish the supremacy of the human being above all things in this earthly world of ours. Thus, in Baulism, nothing is more important than that of human being. As mentioned above, Bauls are secluded population belonging to the lower caste and class of the society who have been denied to lead a decent human life from long past. This alienated situation led them to develop the idea that man is the supreme truth and all Godly qualities are present within human being, and if one can cultivate these inner qualities in a proper manner than life would become meaningful. This philosophical outlook also was depicted in the verse "...mon tumi krishi kaj janona, emon manob jamin roilo patitio abad korley folto sona" pronounced by Kabial Ramaprsad Sen of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal (Banglapadeia 2004.) It means "Oh soul you do not know how to nurture and that's why such human existence remained unsown, if you could

cultivate the same it could yield golden life.’ Thus in mystic explanation Bauls imagined human being as the shadow of God and by upholding human dignity, they try to feel the presence of Godly qualities within them. This is because Bauls wish for obeying no other *tatta* excepting *Manush tatta*. Lalon Fakir in his songs portrays the essence of *Manush tatta* with due significance, where he declares,

*Manush tatta jar satya hoi mone*  
*Seki anyao tatta mane*

### **Translation**

He who conceive humanism  
Does he bother for other theory?

Thus, Bauls have no faith on any deities but believe in the divinity of man. Bauls say, it is man, within whom God Himself play merrily, and for this reason, according to their belief, all veneration and worship should be vested to none other being on this earth but it is man through worshipping whom one can get the nearness of God. Thus, for getting the divine blessing one should respect fellow man only. It is in Baulism where most emphasis was given on human beings and humanism. Bauls uphold the position of human being above all things irrespective of religion, caste, class, and race. It is human being in Baulism by worshipping whom, one can become a true human. Lalon says,

*Manush bhajle sonar manush hobi*  
*Naile pore khyapa re tui mul harabi.*

*Dwidaler mrinale*  
*Sonar manush ujjale*  
*Manush gurur kripa hole*  
*Jante parbi.*

*Manushe Manush gantha*  
*Dekhte jeman alek lata*  
*Jene shune muraao math*  
*Jate tarbi.*

*Manush chhare maanre amar*  
*Dekhbire sob shunyakar*  
*Lalon bole manush akar*  
*Bhajle pabi.*

**Translation**

If you obey the human Guru  
Then you will be a real man  
Otherwise, o my mind  
You will be derailed from the right path.

At the bottom of the Dwidal  
That Supreme Being resides  
If the human Guru takes pity on you  
Only then you can know Him.

That Supreme Man is mingled with this man  
Just as a creepers with the tree  
You vest your worship to right one  
Which guides you right path.

Without the man o my mind  
Every thing is vague and vain  
Lalon says only obeying the man  
You will get the touch of Supreme Soul.

Here, in this above mentioned song Lalon proclaims the highness of manhood above all things. Lalon even denotes that, ‘if anybody does not respect human being than he/she would fail to make his/her life meaningful.’ Lalon asserts that it is humanbeing within whom that Supreme Being dwells for manifesting itself. The Supreme Being does not have definite shape through which it can be manifested that is why it manifests itself in form of human being. This is why the Supreme Being chooses this human figure for its own expression. Lalon says,

*Ei manushe hobe madhurjya bhajan*

*Taite manush rup gothlen Niranjan.*

**Translation**

Within this human figure His manifestation becomes real  
This is why, He created this human beauty.

This is the reason why the followers of Baul cult believe that this human figure is the manifestation of God’s own image. That means they believe this image of their own is actually the image of God, Lalon says,

*Apan surate Adam gothlen dayamoy  
Ta naile ki ferestader sejda dite koy.*

*Allah Adam na hoile  
Paap hoito sejda dile  
Sereki paap jake bole  
E din duniyay.*

*Dushe sei Adam Chhabi  
Azazil hoilo paapi  
Maan tomar lafalafi  
Temni dekha jaai.*

*Admi se chene Adam  
Poshu ki taar jane maram  
Lalon koi adyo dharam  
Adam chinle hoi.*

### **Translation**

God created Adam in His own image  
Otherwise, he would not have ordered the Angels  
To bow down before Adam.

If Adam was not the shadow of God  
It would be considered as hard core sin  
Like sharing the Supreme Being with some one  
In bowing down before Adam

In this world of ours  
Azazil was cursed by the Supreme Being  
For disgracing Adam

O my mind, all your humpty dumpty  
Resembles like that of Azazil.

He who is indoctrinated knows the secret of Adam  
Unveiling the secret of the body centric mystic philosophy  
Lalon says one is able to know the true religion  
By only knowing the secret of Adam.

The above verse clearly proclaims the highness of man as the dwelling place of God by stating that that “the body of man is nothing but the manifestation of Allah.’ Lalon in unhesitant voice stated that, Allah has created the human in his own image for manifesting Himself among His creation. Baul theologians put emphasis on the one of the statement of a Hadith, where it is stated that *‘Inanlaha khalaka Adama Owala suratih* (Riyazul. K. 1994. p. 356). That means Allah says ‘I have created man in my own image.’ It has the similar echo in the Old Testament of Bible in chapter one verse no 26 where it is stated that God says ‘I have created man in my own image. If we ponder on these statements, then we would understand the inner essence of the *Manush tatta*. The main objective of *Manush tatta* of Baul cult is nothing but augmenting the highness of man especially the position of the down trodden population of the society who remains as the principal prey of the ruling elites of the society. According to the cultic belief, Baul considers this man as the shadow of the almighty God. If it is true that man is the apostle of God, then the discrimination among man in the society cannot be the rule. Bauls believe all men are equal and came from the same cradle or origin. Thus we could notice that in Baul cult, God is being replicated by human being, and therefore the dictum of Baul cult is ‘all worship should be offered to human beings, who is the symbol of *Sahaj Manush*(Simple man)’. In one of the Lalon’s songs it is stated that,

*Sahaj Manush bhoje dekh na re maan dibyo gyane*

*Pabi re amulya nidhi bortamane.*

*Bhojo manusher charan duti*

*Nityo bostu hobe khanti*

*Morile hobe sakal mati*

*Tarai e ved nao jene.*

*Morle pabo behest khana*

*Ta shune to maan mane na*

*Bakir lobhe nagat paona*

*Ke chhare bhubane.*

*Assalatul merajul mominina*

*Jante hoi namajer bena*

*Biswashider dekha shona*

*Lalon koi ei jibone.*

## Translation

O my mind, try to understand the '*Shahj Manush*' with spiritual outlook

Then only you can find the priceless gem in this present life.

Offer your pray on the feet of man

Then you can get the real truth of life

All mundane things will go in vain after death

Try to comprehend this reality.

After death we will get heaven

Who does bother for that

Who does spare cash payment in this world

In the hope of due.

(Prayer is the way of meeting with God)

You please ponder on it

Meeting with God for the believer

Lalon says in this present life.

Here, the *Sahaj Manush* means a man who follows that righteous and easy path, who dignified himself through *Guru-badi Sadhana* and not by his birth or by his religious identity, or by his social class or status. This *Sahaj Manush* is the true representative of the down trodden people of the society. Only *Shahj Manush* is capable alone to protect the desolate people from all sorts of torture, subjugation and exploitation on them. There is no other way for their liberty excepting keeping faith on this *Sahaj Manush*. The followers of Bauls do not believe in any other deity other than man and human being and they have full trust on human Guru or *Sahaj Manush*. Bauls believe that they can be freed only by the blessings of *Shahaj Manush*. This is why Lalon Fakir says,

*Manush obishwase pain are sei manush nidhi*

*Ei manushe milto manush chinitam jadi.*

*Adhar chander jotoi khela*

*Sorbo uttam manush leela*

*Na bujhe maan holi bhola*

*Manush bibadi.*

*Je anger abhoy manush  
Chinlinare maan behush  
Manush chhara nai re manush  
Maan adir adi.*

*Dekhe manush chinlam nare  
Chir din mayar ghore  
Lalon bole e din pore  
Ki hobe goti.*

**Translation**

Man, you do not get that Man disbelieving this man  
If you know the secret of man would get that Man within this man.

Man is the best creation of God  
Among all creations created by God  
You do not understand its truth  
Condemn the man.

You do not know that  
This figure of man is of who's figure  
This is not separate from that Man  
Who is the source of all creations.

We do not know the man watching  
For our ignorance of illusion  
Lalon cries what will happen  
After this day is gone over.

The aim of '*Manush Tatta*' of Bauls is to establish the human dignity in its rightful place through preaching equality, fraternity and brotherhood. This is because for a Baul, human body is holier than any place of worship or religious scriptures. Bauls impart importance on Human being as the Supreme and bow their heads not to any super natural power but to human beings only. Lalon says,

*Jetha Jai Manush Dekhi  
Manush dekhe jurai ankhi.*



## Meaning

Wherever I go I only see the image of man

It soothes my eyes.

This verse proclaims the highness of human being. Therefore it can be said that *Manush Tatta* as propounded by the Bauls is nothing but an attempt to explore the potentiality of human beings. In their ritual practices Bauls search for their *Moner Manush* and this *Moner manush* is none other than a manifestation of the sacred image of human being.

## 8.4 Guru Tatta

*Guru Tatta* is another important premise in Baul cult. One is not born as a Baul rather is absorbed into the cult by a Guru. The concept of Guruism could be traced in the earliest Bengali writing *Charjyapada* and this trend also could be found in the *Tantrism, Shaktatism, Shaibaism, Nathism* and among *Vaisnava Sahajiya* cult of ancient Bengal. Baulism inherited the idea of *Guru Tatta*, from the above cult based religions.

In Gurutatta the word Gura is comprised of two words ‘Gu’ which means darkness and ‘Ru’ meaning enlightenment. This means a Guru in accordance to Baul tatta, is a person who is responsible for leading his disciples from the darkness to enlightenment. *Gurutatta* is an important concept not only in Baulism, but it is equally true to all Indian *Sahajiya* religions. We already have come to know that all *Sahajiya* religions are mostly based on body centric mystic *Sadhana*. All body centric mystic *Sadhanas* are more materialistic and practical in nature than that of mystic *Sadhana*. Guru, in body centric mystic *Sadhana*, play the role of a guide for his disciples. Without the proper guidance of a Guru no *Sadhak* can attain desired success in his *Sadhana*. This is why; Guru is considered as an inseparable part in all the *Sahajiya* cultic religions. Shashibhushan Dasgupta stated, “The most important thing in connection with the practical aspect of the *Sahajiya* religion is the selection of proper preceptor. The whole field of Indian philosophy and religion is characterized by a unanimous emphasis on the Guru-vada or the doctrine of preceptors” (Dasgupta. *ibid.* p. 87).

Some scholars are of the opinion that, the concept of Guruism is an outcome of ‘Pirism’ in Islam. Dr. Abdul Karim remarked, “Reverence to the Pir or the concept of super human power of the Pirs is not of Bengal origin. It was imported from Central Asia through Northern India by the Muslim immigrants. But in Bengal, Gurubad found a fertile ground to establish itself on a solid foundation. (Karim. A. *ibid.* p. 310). This idea has been challenged by scholars like Prof.

Ahamed Sharif, who believe that ‘Gurubad’ has its root in the soil of Bengal. Baulism inherited Guruism from the *Lokayata* religious cults like *Tantrism*, *Nathism*, *Shaktism*, *Saibaism* that we have mentioned earlier.

In Sufi-ism, Pir is an important aspect of its religious rituals. At the same time like Indian Guru, it is an inseparable part of Sufi religious practice or *Sadhana*. According to Sufi belief, like Indian Guru, Pir guides his disciples to follow the true path in their mystic life. Like that of Indian Guru-vada, Pir in Sufi-ism is also respected with high esteem. Asim Roy remarked, “Bengali Muslim adoration for the mystic guides as has been reflected in relevant literature, was unique and unlimited, and provided a striking similarities with that of the local non-Muslim attitude towards Guru. In many instances, the term Guru is used parallel with that of the Persio-Arabic equivalents like Pir.... Skaikh and Murshid. (ibid).

The influence of this Pirism was of such high extent that, at one phase of history in every locality of Bengal, the Shrines of Pirs could have been found. This reflects the extent of influence of Guruism or Pirism in Bangali life. Even certain aspects of the general life of common people, were guided not by the state laws or social religious, norms and values but by the instructions of Guru or Pir. Asim Roy adds “The Bengal Muslim folk developed almost a cult and a pantheon of Pirs to whom they resorted in the trials and tribulations of their everyday strenuous life. Pirs in Bengal were as *ubiquitous* as their names were legendary. Their shrines were found every nook and corner of Bengal, in desolate country lanes, in the field and groves, in the forests and in the mountains... the veneration showed to them in life persisted with greater ardor after death, through visitation (*Ziyarat*) to their shrines (called either mazar or dargah). (ibid).

This Guruism or Pirism in Bengal was sometimes turned into a cult and God was replaced by Guru or Pir. This trait is observable in Baul faith too. Guru in Baulism is venerated as a mystic guide as well as a symbol of Godliness. Bauls worship none other but their human Guru. There is popular sayings that ‘if you can’t see something with your own eyes how would you believe that exist’? That is why Bauls do not believe in the existence of any super natural power or divine being having no physical existence or that cannot be seen with eyes. In many of Baul songs especially in Lalon’s songs this had been mentioned eloquently. Lalon in one of his songs uttered;

*Murshid bine ki dhan aar acche re maan e jagate*  
*Je naam swarane haare re, tapito ango shital kore*

*Bhabo bandhan jala chute jai re jaapo oi naam dibarate.*

*Murshider charaner sudha, paan korile jabe khudha*

*Kore nare dele dwidha jehi murshid sehi khoda*

*Oli yel murshita ayat lekha koranete.*

*Aoni khoda aoni nabi apni hon sei adam chhafi*

*Ananta rup kore dharan ke bhuje sainer lilar koron*

*Nirakare hakim niranjan murshid rup oi bhajan pathe.*

*Kulle sain mohit aar, ala kulle sain kadir*

*Por kalam nihaj koro tabe se bhed jante paar*

*Keno Lalon phake phero Fakiri naam parao michhe.*

### **Translation**

O my mind, who is there without the Guru in this world

By reciting whose name frustration perishes away

And all the agonies of life are relinquished

O my mind recite that name in every breath.

All of your hunger and miseries will go away

By yielding yourself on the feet of Murshid

Do not be confused about it that Murshid is the reflection of God

A Quranic verse *Oliyem murshida* reveals the significance of Murshid.

God manifests Himself as different being in different time

Sometimes He is God, sometimes the Prophet and sometimes Adam

Who can understand the enigmatic game of God.

He is Niranjan when he is imageless

But He is murshid when is to be worshipped.

*Kulle sain mohit aar, ala kulle sain kadir*

Read the verse with its real meaning

Only then you can know the secret

Why Lalon, you are preaching tenet of Fakiri

Without understanding the secret.

In the above lyric, Lalon meaningfully depicted Murshid or preceptor as the substitute of God, who alone can bring real salvation for the devotees. In the above song God is manifested in different stages as different beings. For example when God was formless according Lalon, He was named then as *Niranjan*, but when He manifested Himself on the earth, He takes different name in different times. At one stage God appeared as Adam and in another stage He appeared as the Prophet. That means God manifested Himself on the earth through human figures and asked for His worship from the devotee as the *Murshid*. It can therefore be said that according to cultic beliefs of the Bauls, ‘nothing on the earth could be worshipped excepting the *Murshid* or the preceptor.

In Baul cult God was meaningfully replaced by Guru. Upendranath Bahhtyacharjya says that ‘What I have understood from my personal experience about the veneration of Baul to their *Guru* is amazing. I became confused whether there is any other *Guru-vada* cult like Baulism? It is most surprising among the Bauls that, in some instances, *Guru* being physically present gives instructions to his disciples how to control breath, which posture should be followed and what should be done in different stages of feeling during sex-yogic acts of male and female devotees. Interestingly, both male and female devotees do not hesitate even to engage in sex acts before the Guru. Bauls expose all their internal and external secrets of their life before Guru (Bhattacharya. U. p. 304).

In all the minor religious sects, ‘*Guruism*’ is more a practical concept than that of a theoretical analogy. The logic behind such idea is that, one can acquire theoretical knowledge by reading books, but for gaining practical knowledge one needs to have proper guidance and for providing proper guidance one has to enroll himself under a ‘Guide’ or ‘Guru.’ Thus the guidance of ‘Guru’ is necessary in the life of a person to learn lessons and perform their day to day duties. This is the reason why ‘*Guruism*’ and cult religions like Baulism are inseparable.

‘*Guru*’ is considered as an intermediary between man and inner spirit or Godly qualities of human beings. Without becoming a disciple under a ‘*Guru*’ none can be converted into a Baul. Thus *Guru* performs the role of both as a guide and a mentor. *Guruism* as a concept has mystic essence in its inner philosophical interpretation among different cult based religions, but the concept ‘Guru’ in Baulism is more humane in nature than other cultic religions. For a Baul, a *Guru* is like the God Himself. ‘Guru’ though is a man of flesh and blood, but he/she according to Baul belief has the Charisma to relinquish all the agonies and sorrows of the earthly life by

providing proper guidance to his/her disciples. Bauls thus seek shelter to a Charismatic human being, who is capable of guiding them in this unfriendly world. The existence of Guru as an essence of Godly qualities is the upshot of prohibition imposed on the lower class not to worship deities of the ruling religions. This resulted in the emergence of the concept of Guru among the lower stratum of population as a guide, to protect them from all worldly pains and agonies. Even in present day Bangladesh society, Guru or Pir has been playing an important role in the life of common people. The concept of Guru, therefore, could be termed as a social phenomenon rather than as a mystic concept. From this perspective it can be assumed that in Baulism a Guru has been considered as a teacher who teaches his disciples how to face the reality of life, and enlighten the disciple with metaphysical learning. *Guru* is not an esoteric guide to common people; he/she also provides healing, guidance and consolation to the disciples and the common people of the society. From sociological point of view, Guru as a concept and reality is very important to understand the life and living of common people of Bangladesh.

## **8.5 Baul Sadhana (Baul Religious Practice)**

Bauls constitute both a syncretic religious sect and a musical tradition. Bauls lead their religious life through some body centric mystic *Sadhanas* and those are more materialistic in nature rather than idealistic. We already have come to know that followers of all cultic religions originated from among very lower stratum people of the society who for their livelihood had almost nothing except their body as asset. This is the reason Bauls always try to keep their only precious asset, their body, well functioning. Thus consequently all their rituals are more body centric and related to their day to day life experience. We already have discussed about the nature of body centric mystic *Sadhana* of Baul cult in our earlier discussion on *Dehatatta*. In this section we would attempt to discuss on the classification of Baul *Sadhanas* briefly. Baul *Sadhanas* are classified in four categories. These are *Sthulo*, *Probarto*, *Sadhak* and *Siddhi*.

### **8.5.1 Sthulo Sadhana**

*Sthulo* is the primary stage of the Baul *Sadhana*. In Baul *Sadhana* three things are considered to be very significant. They are *Gaati*, *Raati* and *Maati*. *Gaati*, in Baul *Sadhan* is the *Sadhana* or practice of breathing. *Sthulo* stage of Baul *Sadhana* is the technique on practicing *Gaati Sadhana*. *Gaati* in Baul terms means ‘breathing’, which helps the functioning of the body. Human body functions through number of veins and among these *Ida*, *Pingola* and *Sushanma* are the principal veins. These three veins are also termed as *Ganga*, *Yamuna* and *Swarsati* in

Hindu religious term. Through these veins Semen, blood and *Raaja* or blood of menstruation are passed. If anybody could attain the power of controlling the breathing, he could also control his own body as well. This is why, in this stage, the *Sadhak* is instructed to practice the procedure for controlling his breathing. It is believed in Baul cult that, normal human being breaths 21600 times in a day. If any *Sadhak* could control breathing by *Kumbhak* process and lessen the frequency of passing of breath, then the *Sadhak* could attain a very sound and long life. Thus at the very initial stage of teaching; *Guru* advises his disciples to practice *Pranayama* following the *Rechak*, *Purak* and *Kumbhak* methods for holding and controlling breathing. Taking a breath is called *Purak* and similarly leaving breath is called *Rechak* and taking hold the breath is called *Kumbhak*. This methods function through the above mentioned three principal veins of which *Ida* is connected with *Purak* and *Pingola* is with *Rechak*.

*Gaati Sadhana* or *Pranayama* practice is an inseparable thing of Baul *Sadhana*. *Pranayama Sadhana* is considered as the most important *Sadhana*. Without success in this stage none could attain to uplift oneself in the next stage of *Sadhana*. This *Gaati* in Baul tenets and in other cultic songs is mentioned with due significance. Lalon puts due emphasis on this *Gaati Sadhana* or *Bayu Sadhana* with great importance. He narrated that without the completion of the *Bayu* or *Gaati Sadhana* no *Sadhak* can attain the blessings of the Supreme Soul. Lalon says,

*Haoya dharo agni sthir koro*

*Jate morileo bachite paro.*

*Bare bare korire maana*

*Kaamer ghore aar jeona*

*Rekho tejer ghar tejiyana*

*Urdho chad dhore.*

### **Translation**

Take the control of the Haoya (air) and make the fire steady

As if you can be alive even after death.

I forbid you my mind repeatedly

Not to go to commit sex

Keep steady your valour

Holding control over the upper moon.

In the above lyric, the term *Haoa* is referred to breath. Lalon in this song explained that by controlling the breath one can make the fire (the sex feeling) calm. Sex which is symbolically expressed in Baul language as a serpent and always invokes to do wrong and causes obstacle in reaching the target, could be brought to an end by controlling the breath. Thus Bauls eventually believe that if any *Sadhak* could block the flame he could attain due success in his *Sadhana* and finally could spare death (In Baul cultic belief it is stated that committing sex without the purpose of reproduction is prohibited and lose of semen without reproduction is believed to be as the death. Therefore, according to cultic belief, a Baul *Sadhak* when controlling breath should also be able to hold his semen. This is considered as the sparing of death. This is why, the main goal of Baul *Sadhana* is to get the capability of retention and for the desired success in the practice of retention *Pranayama* is a must which is practiced in the very primary stage of *Sthulo Sadhana* satge for promoting oneself to the next higher stage the *Proborto*.

### 8.5.2 Proborto

When a *Sadhak* successfully could complete his *Pranayama Sadhana* stage, he is promoted to *Proborto*-the next stage of Baul *Sadhana*. This stage is related to *Raati Sadhana* and it is a sex-yogic *Sadhana*. In this stage the *Sadhak* tries to have control over his *Raati* (Semen). Bauls believe that *Sahasrar* which is located on the forehead and where the Divine power or *Kulakundalini* power (it is guessed as the serpent which seats with tree twisted, is the symbol of lust) seats in the *Muladhar Chakra* and if any *Sadhak* could unite with this *Kulakundalini* power, then he could get the supreme bliss. If the *Sadhak* could successfully control his lust and turn it into the power of love, than the *Sadhak* could attain ultimate success in his *Sadhana* by enjoying the Supreme bliss. This stage of Baul *Sadhana* is more influenced by the Tantric philosophy. In this stage Baul *Sadhak* determining the *Chakra* with the method of *Pranayama* tries to pump up his semen upward to get the supreme bliss. According to Tantric tradition there are six Chakras in this body through which they can attain the supreme bliss. They are as bellows:

- (a) *Muladhara-Chakra*, or the sacri-coccygeal plexus, situated between the penis and the anus and facing down with four petals of red color.
- (b) *Svadhithana-Chakra* or sacralplexus, near the root of the penis with six petals of the colour vermilion.
- (c) *Manipura-Chakra*, or the lumber plexus in the region of the naval with ten petals of the colour of cloud.

- (d) *Anahata-Chakra* in the heart with twelve petals of the colour of Bandhuka-flower (red).
- (e) *Visuddha-Chakra* or the laryngeal and pharyngeal plexus at the junction of the spinal chord and the medulla oblongata with sixteen petals of smoky colour. And finally
- (f) *Ajna-Chakra* between the eye-brows with two petals of white colours. Above all, there is *Sahasrara-Cakra* or lotus (*Padma*) in the highest cerebral region. (Dasgupta. *ibid.* p. 91).

*Sadhak* having been perfection in *Pranayama Sadhana* proceeds to transform his sex passion which is located at the *Muladhara-Chakra* into love by blending mind and pumping that sex passion up to the *Sahasrara*. Dr. Ahmad Sharif says that ‘In the *Proboto* stage the *Sadhak* tries to circulate the semen accumulated in the *Sushanma* to brain through *Ida* for attaining the supreme bliss in his sexo-yogic practice.(*ibid.*)

### 8.5.3 *Sadhak*

When a devotee gets success in the *Proborto* stage taking control of his semen, then he is regarded as *Sadhak*- the third stage of Baul austerity. In this stage Baul *Sadhak* can flow his semen accumulated in the encephalon to *Sushanma* through the *Pingola*. As a consequence the semen flows like a torrent of tidal water from *Ajna-Cakra* to *Muladhara-Cakra* and then the body gets the blissful overflow of love which is called *Tarunyamrito*.

### 8.5.4 *Siddhi*

When a *Sadhak* successfully transcend the *Sadhak* stage, then he gains capability of taking control of semen to circulate through the *Ida*, *Pingola* and *Sushanma* according to his wish which gives him ultimate satisfaction of *Samyarsa* or the ultimate supreme bliss and ever ending enjoyment which is called *Labanyamiro Parabar*. By this process normal sex passion turned into the *Samyarsa* and all the agonies of death and sickness perish away as well as the eternal freshness and enjoyment comes into existence. (Sharif. A. *ibid.* p.52).

Besides this, some Baul *Sadhaks*, however, say about other kinds of Baul *Sadhanas*, they are *Aul*, *Baul*, *Darbesh*, *Sain*, and *Fakir.Aul*. According to Baul tatta, a *Sadhak* is the normal followers of Baulism. A Baul is an indoctrinated devotee while a *Darbesh* is a self purified man, *Sain* is a man who attains the ultimate knowledge of metaphysics and *Fakir* is a man who acquires the s knowledge of self. *Fakir* stage according to Mohammad Ali Sain,( a veteran Baul *Sadhak* and the caretaker of Lalon’s shrine) is the highest stage of Baul *Sadhana*. He during my field visit interview explained, ‘...to write the word *Fakir* you need four Arabic letters, they are Fa, Kaf, Ya, Ra. Each of these letters carries a separate and significant meaning which indicates



every stage of self dissolution to *Guru* for getting the supreme bliss.’ For example, according to the explanation by Mohammad Ali Sain, Fa stands for the word *Fana*- the Sufi term, which means to surrender under the feet of *Guru*. Without submission oneself into the feet of *Guru* completely, according to the cultic believe, no one can get desired success in their *Sadhana*. For a devotee, it is the *Guru* who acts as the proper guide and mentor. Without *Guru*’s kind mercy, no one could come across the true path. Lalon repeatedly warned his followers to surrender fully into the feet of *Guru*. It is said in a lyric:

*Keno dubli ne maan Gurur charane*

*Ese Kaal saman bandhbe kondine.*

*Aamar putra aamar dara*

*Sanger sathi keu noi tara*

*Jete Swashane;*

*Aste eka jete eka*

*Taki dekhis ne.*

*Nidrabashe nishi gelo*

*Britha kaje deen phuralo*

*Cheye dekhli ne;*

*Ebar gel ear hobe na*

*Parbi kukhane.*

*Khono tor ache samai*

*Sadhle kichhu faal paoya jai*

*Jadi nei mane;*

*Siraj Sain koy abodh Lalon*

*Bhrame bhulis ne.*

### **Translation**

Why do you o my mind not submit yourself on the feet of *Guru*

Anytime the death will arrest you.

My son, my brothers and relatives

No one will accompany me

In the journey to cremation;

You were alone when you came

And same will happen in time of return

Why do you not understand it.

You pass your night by sleeping

And day by business of mundane activities

O you fool do not ponder on it;

If this life gone over

There will be no scope for correction.

Yet you have some times in your hand

Still there is a chance to get salvation by your austerity

If you wish;

Siraj Sain warns the stupid Lalon

Do not fall in illusion.

Siraj Sai in the above mentioned song instructed the Baul followers to be completely submissive to *Guru* for having salvation from the earthly life. This is why Lalon advises his followers to do due *Sadhana* according to the instruction of *Guru*. Without complete surrender to *Guru* no *Sadhana* can be performed.

*Kaf* stands for the word *Kenyaet*- means the holiness. That means submission to *Guru* should be with very holy and solemn mind. In this stage, the devotee should not keep any complicity in his mind.. In the cultic belief, therefore, any devotee having any kinds of complication cannot get the bliss of God. Lalon Fakir in one of his songs says,

*Chor dhore rakhbi jadi*

*Hrid garad korge khanti*

*Lalon koi khunti nathi*

*Thakle k ichor dei chhunte.*

### **Translation**

If you want to reach the God

First of all keep your mind holy

Lalon says does God come within catch

If you cannot be free from complicity.

The next letter *Ya* of the word *Fakir* what Mohammad Ali Sain explained stands for *Iyad* the Urdu word which means remembrance. That means when a disciple surrender himself

completely into the feet of *Guru* with holy heart and solemn mind, then he is advised to utter the name given by the Guru continuously. Without the concurrent utterance of the name given by Guru, no one can get the bliss of God. This is why Lalou advised his disciples to recite the sermon instructed by the Guru stating,

*Mukhe pore sada La-Ilaha-Ilalla*

*Ain bhejilen Rasulullah.*

*Namer sahit rupo*

*Dhiyane rakhiya jopo*

*Benishanai jadi dako*

*Chinbi ki rup ke Allah.*

*La-Sharik Janiya take*

*Poro kalam dile mukhe*

*Mukti pabi thakbi sukhe*

*Dekhbi re nur Tajella.*

*La-Ilaha nafi se hai*

*Ilalla sei Din Dayamoy*

*Nafi-Esbat jahare koi*

*Sehito Ebadullah.*

*Bolechhe Sain Allah Nuri*

*Ei jikirere daraja bhari*

*Siraj Sain tai koi fukari*

*Shunre Lalou belella.*

### **Translation**

Always recite o my mind La-Ilaha-Ilalla

The Prophet disseminated the sermon.

Recite the name along with its beauty

Having in the meditation

If you recite the name without the beauty

How do you recognize who and how is God.

Recognizing Him as La-Sharik

Recite the sermon both by mouth and mind

Then you will get salvation and bliss

And watch the glimses of Nur Tajella.

Avoiding the concept of non-existence

Believe the existential God firmly

It is called Nafi-Ajbat (self-knowledge)

And only that being is worshipable.

It is said by the lightful God

The recitation of the sermon carries immense significance

Siraj Sain, says in applause

Listen it you stupid Lalon.

And last one *Ra* which stands for the word *Riyajat* means to preach. It means when a devotee attains instant understanding of the sermon with holy body and solemn mind submitting himself completely to the *Guru*, then he reaches the highest level of Baul *Sadhana* and is dignified as Fakir. After getting Fakiri designation he gets the permission to preach the Baul tatta that means he can take disciples and the devotee gets Vek-khelafat.

## 8.6 Vek Khelafat

*Vek-Khelafat* is the ultimate honour and the recognition to a Baul *Sadhak* which is accomplished through a distinguished ceremony of '*Khilafat*'. In other word it is termed as symbolic funeral ceremony for a *Shadhak* by which *Sadhak* becomes a *gyanta Mara* (Living dead). After the completion of the ceremony of Vek Khelafat the 'Baul' devotee being a man of flesh and blood, embarks spiritually to a new life where he resides without any kind of earthly desire like a dead man. He fulfills his minimum needs just for keeping himself alive. In this sense Vek Khilafat is the symbol of death. This is why the ceremony of '*Khilafat*' is full of pathos and mind-blowing. It touches our emotion and it is very difficult to hold tears for the beholders. After having this '*Khilafat*, a man spiritually is considered as dead. Baul's esoteric practice is of interactive dual practice of a couple, specifically indoctrinated male and female. So the '*Khelefat*' is being rendered jointly to a devotee couple. ( Hossain. A. I. 2014. p. 32).

In the morning of the day of ceremony, at first, the male devotee after having shower wears '*Dore-Koupin*' which symbolizes the ending of reproduction forever. Then *Sadhakh* is dressed

with white cloth which is partially called '*Kafan*' (a special un-patched garment for the dead body) along with his female mate. It is divided into two parts for the male partner. By one part he covers his waist to foot like lungi and by another part which is like '*Ukhill*' known as '*Khirk*' in Baul terminology and he has to wear the same for the rest of his life. The female devotee's whole body is to be wrapped up with an unstitched *Saree*, one part of which is to be tied with the turban of his male devotee and the other edge remains open. It conveys the meaning that the female mate will not engage in any sort of bitter relation with her male mate. The whole ceremony reveals that after having '*Khilafat*' a Baul will metaphorically be considered as a dead person. It means, a death person can never come back to the family and in social life. Thus after attaining '*Khilafat*' a Baul also cannot ever go back to his family and social life nor can he be involved in any day to day affairs. Even if any Baul has any property or any relatives, he must vest all of his property to someone else and cut off all sorts of relationships with all of his relatives. Baul with *khilafat* has to leave the residence forever. They cannot have any permanent residence; they just pass their days and nights in *Akhras* which is considered as mortuary to socially preserve the living dead person. He will have no desire, no greed, no requirement, and no reaction to anything and he will never again be engaged in any earthly activities excepting aspiring for joining with the Supreme invisible being. (ibid).

### **8.7 Sadhusango-An Alternative Way of life**

*Sadhusanga* is a very significant and distinguished institutional phenomenon in Baul cult. It bears a distinctive characteristic that makes the Baul cultic rituals very meaningful to its followers. Through *Sadhusanga* the followers of Baul cult attempt to establish a communally harmonious society, suitable for their own living. In this social set up of their own, all the followers enter into a new world which is totally different from the society in which they previously lived before embracing Baul faith. This can be viewed as an attempt of the Bauls to create a society having no discrimination among its members irrespective of class, color, creed and gender. This idea of the Bauls could be seen as defiance against the existing caste and class based society and against the norms and values that discriminate human beings. It is a society within the society. *Sadhusanga* is an inseparable part and parcel of the Baul cult. A follower has to attend in *Sadhusanga* for his spiritual as well as social liberty. It is so important that no person can become a true disciple without attending in the *Sadhusanga* and, thus, it is believed that by

attending *Sadhusanga*, a devotee can get the supreme bliss of God. It is stated in one of Lalon's songs that,

*Sadhusanga Sadhusanga sarbo loke koi*

*Sashusango haoya matra jeeb paramer chhoya paai.*

### **Translation**

Every one speaks about *Sadhusangu*

By attending *Sadhusanga*

One can get the supreme bliss of God.

This is why; every followers of Baul cult aspire to attend the *Sadhsanga*. They believe it is the way of attaining emancipation from miserable human life. Bauls always remain eager to attend *Sadhusang* and keep on alert so that they do not fail to participate in the *same* in their earthly life. *Sadhusanga* is a Baul cultic institution, participating in which, according to the Baul beliefs, a person could relinquish their mundane and spiritual penury. For this reason, all the followers of the Baul cult feel anxious if they fail to attend the *Sadhusanga*. Lalon says:

*Helai helai deen boye jaai*

*Ghire nilo kale.*

*Ar ki hobe emon manab jibon*

*Bosbo Sadhu mele.*

### **Translation**

My days are going in vain

And death is knocking at the door

Will this human life come back again?

And I shall be able to participate in *Sadhusang*.

For Bauls, human life is very important. They believe in re birth and supposed that one can get the blessings of human life in the cycle of eighty four lacs rebirth in different forms. Therefore, we all should be very concerned about this life. One should try to make human life meaningful through good deeds and by participating in assemblage of the Sadhus. Only by following such life, a person could get ultimate freedom from re birth again. If someone fails, he/she will face the consequences of rebirth and no one knows; whether she/he will born again as a human being or not. This doctrine of re-birth was brought in to Baulism from Busddhism .Thus Lalon advised

his followers to make their life meaningful by making union with *Sadhu* in *Sadhusanga*. Lalon says,

*Dekho dekho monorail*

*Hoyechhe udoi*

*Ki anandamoi Sadhur bazare*

*Paapir bhagye emon deen ki ar hore re.*

*Sadhu Gurur ki mahima*

*Vede dite naai taar sima*

*Heno Sadh sabhai ene maan amaar*

*Abar janmo phere felis nare.*

*Jethai re sadhur bazar*

*Sethai sainer baram nirantar*

*Heno pade jar nistha maan hai na taar*

*Na jani kapale ki ache re.*

*Sadhu Gurur batase re maan*

*Baner kastho hoi re chandan*

*Fakir Lalon bole maan*

*Khonjo ki aar dhan*

*Ebar Sadhusange ango besh kore nere.*

### **Translation**

Behold, O my mind

What a blissful the association of *Sadhu* is!

Will it be happened again in life of a sinner like me?

What a virtuous the *Sadhu* is

That the Vedas cannot explain

Do not fall me in the cycle of rebirth

Giving me the chance of connecting with such *Sadhusabha*.

Where the *Sadhusanga* happens

There *Sain* dwells with boundless mercy

Those who do not take the chance

What a wretched fellow he is!

With the union of *Sadhu Guru*

A sinner becomes blessed

Fakir Lalon says why do you hesitate

To meet with the sadhu undoubtedly?

Thus, for the followers of Baul cult *Sadhusanga* is considered mandatory. In *Sadhusanga*, Bauls get lessons from *Guru*. Customarily sometimes common attendants of the *Sadhusanga* get apprenticeship to *Guru*. In *Sadhusanga* disciples with full devotion present themselves before the *Guru* and place their problems. *Guru* by explaining the reasons of the problems the disciples are facing unknot those. In a sense, *Sadhusanga* to some extent could be compared with the “Sophists” who were specific kind of teachers in Ancient Greece, in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Like the Sophists *Shadhus* in *Shadhusanga* are the moving academic institutions for the disciples. They teach and train the necessary cultic lessons to their disciples.

There are two types of *Sadhusanga*. These are: weekly *Shadhusanga* and yearly *Shadhusanga*. Common rituals are followed in both.

### 8.7.1 Weekly *Sadhusanga*

Weekly *Shadhusangais* generally held on Thursday night in the residence of *Guru*. Devotees from different places gather and make utterance of cultic holy name ‘*Allah Alek*’ (the invisible God). All the *participants* after taking their *asan* (seat) bow down to the *Sabha Guru*. With the permission and instruction of *Guru*, a fellow devotee offer *Chal-Jal* (rice and water) as the part of the ritual of *Sadhusanga* among the participants. All the participants take the offering by reciting the following cultic mantra,

*‘Asmane jan*

*Khakite paran*

*Eso murshid boso kole*

*Chal pani dilam tomar gale.*

*Chal-pani niye santusto hao.*

#### **Translation**

On the sky is the life

And on the earth is mind

Please come my Murshid and seats on my lap



And be pleased taking *Chal-pani* (rice and water).

With the recitation of this mantra, all attending devotees by taking the *Chal-jal* take their seats.

In *Sadhusanga* every activity is to be followed with cultic rituals. They also recite a mantra at this stage as well. The mantra is as below,

*Adi satya, adi sakti*

*Basumata tumi amar*

*Tumi thakite jeno kosto na hoi.*

### **Translation**

The *Basumati* (earth) you are

The universal truth and primordial power

I am your son

So, as if, I may not fall in misery.

It is important to note that, even in their mantras, the devotees portray their agonies of life. For attaining social liberty and for getting rid of all kinds of misery Bauls perform these rituals which has sociological significance than that of mysticism.

After bowing down before the Guru all devotees take their *Asan* (seat). They are then offered light foods like *Muri* (Puffed rice) and tea. After having snacks, the *Ason Guru* instruct the devotees for offering the song which is the triggering components of the *Sadhusanga*. The devotees start singing the songs of Lalon Fakir. Then they one by one sing different types of song of Baultatta for example, we can mention here about the songs on *Sreestitatta*, *Dehotatta*, *Gurutatta* etc. Disciples put the cryptic questions to *Guru* on different issues related to Baul Philosophy. *Guru* then through singing songs unveils the riddle of the questions put forward by the disciples. In the gap between the songs, a deep intellectual discussion on the cultic philosophy takes place between Guru and disciples. Disciples in this stages get the proper and necessary cultic lessons from Gurus discussion. The program continues till midnight. At midnight, the gathering is offered *Anna Seba* (dinner) with plain rice, vegetable and *Dal*. No protein food is allowed at dinner. In the early morning, the attendants start morning prayers by singing *Gostho Gaan* (Songs related the event of the childhood of Lord Krishna). Devotee sings the songs with deep devotion,

*Gosthe chalo Hari Murari.*

*Laye godhan gosther kanan*

*Chalo gokul bihari.*

*Tui amader sange jabi*

*Banaphal khete pabi*

*Amra male tui banchabi*

*Tai tore sange kori.*

*Ore O bhai kele sona*

*Charane nupur de na*

*Mathai mohan chura ne na*

*Dhara paro bangshidahri.*

*Je tarabe ei tribhuban*

*Sei jabe aj gosther kanan*

*Thik rekho maan abhai charan*

*Lalon oi charaner bhikhari.*

**Translation**

O Hari Murari (Lord Krishna)

Please set out for the *Gostha* garden with the flock of cows

For tendering the flock of cows.

You will be with us

And will get wild fruits to eat

You will save us from the crisis

This is why we want your accompany.

O my black gold

Please put on anklet on your feet

Enchanting top-knot on head

And have a flute in your hand.

He who saves this universe

Will be today with us

Make steady your mind to him

Lalon is an aspirant for His feet.

After the performing *Gostha Gaan* at morning hour, *Balyaseba* (breakfast) is served to the devotees with the *Payesh* (A special food made of rice, milk, sugar and coconut) along with curd, banana and *Khai* (Puffed rice or grain). At noon, *Purnaseba* (lunch) is served to the attendants. In this *Purnaseba* fish, dal and vegetable are allowed to eat, but meat is not permissible. After having the *Purnaseba* (lunch), all the participant *Sadhus* and devotees take farewell bid from the *Sadhusanga* by reciting the cultic name ‘*Allah Alek*’.

### 8.7.2 Yearly Sadhusanga

It is generally held on a particular occasion in a particular day once or twice in a year. All the rituals of the yearly and weekly *Sadhusanga* are almost same. Thus it is needless to explain the same again.

### 8.8 Sadhusanga: A symbol of an alternative society

*Sadhusanga*, could be termed as an institution within the Baul community. Through *Sadhusanga* the followers of Baul community aspire to establish a society of their own in which everybody will be treated equally. There will be no discrimination among its members irrespective of caste, religion, colour, social position. Even there will be no status discrimination among the Gurus of different *Ghars*. In the *Sadhusanga* members do not bother for the existing social rules, customs, norms and values that make discrimination among human beings. *Shadhusangaey* is an aspiration of the Bauls to create a society with new norms, values, ethics and custom for their own survival.

### 8.9 Taboo

In every society there exist certain norms, values, ethics and Taboos. In Baulism too these are in existence. Such as, after becoming member of the Baul community, disciple has to follow the taboos as the part of their *Sadhana*. In Baul cult taboos could be observed in their eating habit, attitudes towards life and so on. After being sermonized a disciple is instructed not to eat meat or slaughter any animal. In some instances, fish is allowed to consume but in most of the cases for a *Sadhak*, eating any protein food is strictly prohibited. Similarly a disciple is also advised not to pluck flowers, even not to cut grass, any trees or soil as well.

## 8.10 Norms and values

In the Baul cultic believe when a disciple is accepted by the community then all of his belongings are offered to his *Guru*. Even his family name also has to be changed. Bauls treat their Guru as the father and wife of Guru as mother.

## 8.11 Festivals

Baul is a *Guru* centric religion. *Guru* is therefore, treated very significantly with utmost veneration, whom they treat above all things in the world. Thus, *Guru* to every follower of Baulism is the most important as well as influential person. This is why all the celebrations, in Baul cult are *Guru* centric and for this reason, they celebrate different festivals held by their own *Gurus*. Besides this, two grand festivals are celebrated by all the followers of Baul cult which is held in the shrine of Fakir Lalon Shah spelled as the Baul Samrat unanimously. With spontaneous participation of all the followers of all *Gurus*, as well as followers of different cultic religions of Bengal, also participation of foreign devotees these festivals are gorgeously celebrated. One of these two festivals is *Maschhab* on *Dol Purnima* held in the month of *Falgun* the eleventh month of Bengali calendar. This festival was introduced by Fakir Lalon Shah himself and another one is the death anniversary of Lalon Faki on the 1<sup>st</sup> *Kartik*-seventh month of Bengali calendar. These festivals are celebrated very colourfully and national fervor.

### 8.11.1 Machchab

Fakir Lalon Shah himself introduced *Machchab* festival for his community but, the time of its initiation was not recorded. Most of the scholars are of opinion that it might be introduced in thirties or mid-thirties of nineteenth century. History records show that, after a long wandering life Lalon Fakir settled and built his Akhra at Chheuriya of Kushtiya in 1823. Prof. Ahmad Sahif mentioned in his book titled *Baul O Sufi Sahitya* in Benga that, Lalon in 1823 after a long wandering life, visiting different pilgrimages, finally settled in the village *Chheuriya* and married a women from local Muslim weavers community. (ibid). We, therefore, can hypothesize that some times after 1823 Fakir Lalon Sha introduced this *Machchab*. It is a holy gathering where different esoteric lessons are exchanged among the participants.

Lalon's *Machchab* starts on the full moon of the month of *Falgun* (*Dol Purnima*)- the eleventh month of the Bengali calendar and it's continues for 24 hours and are divided into eight segments (*Asto Prohor*). Each of these segments are related to different significant *Sadhanas*.

We provide below a taxonomy of the ceremony with table in courtesy of a veteran Baul votary Fakir Nahir Shah.

Afternoon 3.00-4.00 pm (according to the time of fullmoon)	Arrival of the <i>Sadhus</i>
Afternoon 4.00-4.30 pm	Taking seat and starting ritualistic performance
Afternoon 4.30-5.00 pm	Remembrance of the supreme Being and sentient (at present they remember the life and teaching of Lalon Fakir)
At evening 6.00- 7.30 pm	Guru Karma
At night 7.30 -8.30	A short break with light repast
Night 8.30-9.00 pm	Sing songs offering
Night 9.30- 11.30	Sings songs of different Baul composers.
The next day morning 6.00-700 am	Gostha Gaan
Morning 7.00 8.00	Guru Karma
Morning 8.00- 9.00 am	Balyo Seba
9.00 am -3.00 pm	Offering songs of different Baul composers
Afternoon 3.00-4.30 pm	Purna Seba
Afternoon 4.30-5.30 pm	Bidayi Pronam

*Machchab* is very popular among the followers of Baul cult. Lalon during his lifetime used to organize it regularly. Huge number of participants used to attend in the *Machchab*. In Hitokory- a fortnightly local magazine published by great litterateur Meer Mosharraf Hossain it was mentioned that Lalon used to arrange a fete (Fair) in winter season, where thousands of his disciples regularly participated and performed musical sessions and organized esoteric discussion. Lalon used to spend around Tk 500/Tk 600 for holding this fete (Karim. A. ). It can thus be guessed that the fair was a gala occasion and all the followers of Baul cult used to attend the gala spontaneously. But now a day the *Machchab*, has lost its solemnity and has turned into a

village fair. People from different region till participate in the festival. Ironically for the callousness and corruption of the organizers of *Machhab* the fair is gradually losing its past glory.

### **8.11.2 Lalon Sworanatsob**

It is one of the biggest festivals of Baul community celebrated each year on the day of death of Lalon Fakir and is held on 1<sup>st</sup> *Kartik*. The festival was initiated by very close disciples of Lalon Fakir after his death. Same rituals and activities like the *Machhab* are followed by the disciples. At the initial phase it was held for one day. But in course of time it has turned into the local fair losing its all esoteric characters like *Machhab*. It is now celebrated for five days. Unfortunately it needs to be mentioned here that, now the program is sponsored by corporate houses, and done in a very colorful way but has lost its real spirit.

Baul now is a community. They are living in the mainstream society but at the same time they have created their own enclave within this society. They have created some new norms, values, taboos for their own which have sociological significance. It should be remembered that Baul philosophy has emerged from soil of Bengal and thus Baul philosophy is the philosophy of Bengal.

### **8.14 Conclusion**

In Nineteenth century Bengal, Baulism reached its zenith under Charismatic leadership of Fakir Lalon Shah as Baul Guru. (Sharif. A). Indeed under his gifted guidance during this period of history, Baulism spread all over Bengal. The role of Fakir Lalon Shah as the ‘Guru’ of 19<sup>th</sup> century Baul community carries historical significance in constructing the social history of Bengal. Lalon through his lyrical tenets sent messages to his followers as guidelines for the down trodden population to uphold the dignity of human being. For fulfilling the duties of a Baul, Lalon instructed his disciples about the way the Bauls should follow in their day to day life. Bauls treat Lalon’s song as day to day code of conduct in their life. His teachings left tremendous impact on the poor, exploited segment of the population of rural Bengal. His teachings put forward various directions about life and living of the lower stratum population of the society. Interestingly his activities were not confined within the preaching of religious sermons only. He also literally organized mass people to fight against all social oppressions and persecutions of the upper class -the ultimate goal of the Baul cult.

Baulism started its institutional journey in early seventeenth century through the preaching and teaching of Beer Bhadra the disciple of the Mahad Bibi, a Muslim woman, the founder of the Baul cult. But it got solid foundation and wide popularity through the preaching of Fakir Lalon Shah, generally known as the Baul Samrat (the emperor of Baul). Some sporadic initiatives might have earlier been initiated before Lalon Fakir in the development of the Baul philosophy, but those were not mention-worthy. It is Fakir Lalon Shah, who almost single handed made Baulism widely popular among the people of all level at home and abroad simultaneously. With the teaching and preaching of Fakir Lalon Shah Baulism hasnow been credited as the icon of our cultural heritage, our national philosophy- the philosophy of Bengal rather than simply a cultic religion. At the same time by the scholastic initiative of Lalon Fakir Baulism had also become the centre of thinking of the civil society as well. Now a day's Baulism earned wide popularity among mass population both in rural as well as urban society of Bangladesh. At the time when most of the folk religions are on the verge of decay, Baulism has been gaining wide popularity. A new trait has begun by following the teaching and preaching of Lalon Fakir. This new trait has turned into a new *Gharana* named as *Lalon Shahi Gharana* that has a separate communal flavor. Some scholars and *Sadhus* assert that *Lalon Shahi Gharaa* is a separate and different ideology from Baul cultic philosophy. But our observation is that *Lalon Shahi Gharana* is an offshoot of Baul cult and the teachings and preaching of Lalon Shah is the philosophical essence of Baul tenets. We, therefore can say that, Lalon's teaching and preaching is not a separate philosophy, but the Baul philosophical utterance and Lalon is brightest exponent of Baul philosophical School.

## CHAPTER 9

### Lalon and His Contemporary Society

#### 9.0 Introduction

The socio-cultural and religious fabrics of the land earlier known as Bengal and part of which is now called Bangladesh, have gradually been woven in course of its long history. History depicts that, Bengal literally remained under different foreign rulers for a very long period. Long foreign dominations shaped the life and living pattern of its population. In course of its long history of subjugation, people of this land sometimes revolted against their rulers and tried to free themselves through armed struggle, or they confined themselves within their own social domain keeping least contact with the rulers, excepting paying taxes to them. In its long history, when torture and oppressions of the ruling nobility crossed the limit of tolerance, people revolted against their oppressors. Sometimes these revolts took the shape of armed struggles and in many instances those were social defiant movements in the form of cultic religious upheavals. Thus Bengal witnessed many changes and upheavals in different times of its history. These changes and upheavals to a great extent impacted the life pattern of its population at large. In the process, different ideological ideas and philosophical thinking emerged in this land. Obviously most of these ideas and philosophical thinking were the ideas and thinking of subjugated population. These ideas and thinking that emerged in different time periods of its history, aimed at emancipating the mass people of the land or 'Bhumiputras' from the inhuman exploitations, negligence and dominations of the ruling class who were foreigners. One of such philosophical outcomes was Baul philosophy. In earlier chapters we discussed about the emergence of Baulism and about its basic philosophical tenets. Baul movement reached its zenith under the leadership of a Charismatic Sage in 19<sup>th</sup> century named Lalon Shah. Baulism is actually an assimilation of all different ideas and philosophical thinking that surfaced in different periods of Bengal history. In this Chapter I tried to portray the life and living of Lalon Shah and his contemporary social surroundings. Under the dynamic leadership of Lalon Shah, Baulism turned into most prominent cultic philosophical idea of Bengal in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The land that is now known as Bangladesh, from historical past was a prohibited zone for the people of other parts of Indian subcontinent. The original inhabitants of this land or the 'Bhumiputras' were the 'Kol', Mundas' 'Kirats' and so on, who lived almost a secluded life



having their own tradition and culture. Like other tribal groups, ancient people of Bengal also lived in a life of communal harmony among them and without the presence of any caste and class divisions. The Aryans conquered India coming from the west and termed the land of Bengal as a '*Pandab Biborjito Desh*' meaning a land where Pandvas hate to enter. Mughals termed Bengal as "*Dojakh pur Ajnana*" or a hell full of Bread. All these negative terms applied to portray Bengal was due to the fact that the land was inaccessible for outsiders because of its topographic features, dense forests, very humid weather, but at the same time it was very fertile producing different crops, fruits and other goods in abundance.

We have mentioned above that the ancient population of Bengal lived in a life of communal harmony having no social class division among the clan members. (Hosain. A. I. 2016;p.51) But with the advent of the Aryans as conqueror, this communal harmony among the local population gradually shattered. The reason was, the introduction of caste based rules and regulations by the Aryan conqueror. Aryans introduced the rigid caste system that turned the original inhabitants into slaves of the conqueror and for next thousands years they remained subjugated, oppressed and tortured. In the stream of time, Aryan conquest of India was followed by series of invasions by different foreign powers i.e. Shaka, Huns, Mughals, Pathans, and lastly by the British and the population of whole of India had to remain subjugated for a very long period in history. This long domination under foreign rules, gradually ruptured the very moral back bone of the local population. Prof. Ahamed Sharif observed "... for last two thousand years, people of Bengal had been ruled and were exploited by the foreign rulers. They had little or no scope to develop their own self or expand their horizon of mind, because, mass population living under colonial rule, get little scope to climb the ladder of power and prestige or could venture for any independent trading, business or earning for their own. It is said that, paucity compels individuals to indulge in unethical corrupt behavior. Poverty destroys all the qualities of a human being. Tear down all possibilities of self-illumination. The road to self enhancement and self-reliance becomes narrow. Thinking about life and living remains caged within the limit of the boundary of one's own circle of living. One cannot expect passionate humane behavior from persons who always hanker after how to arrange foods just for survival....."(Sharif, A. 2001; p.19).

The downgraded, tortured, subjugated population of Bengal, in order to escape from oppressions of the rulers, gradually detached themselves from the ruling elites and took refuge into their own

domain of cultural life pattern in which they sought their own emancipation. Consequently various cult based religious groups emerged in ancient Bengal. The basic theme of all these religious ideas were emancipation of human beings from the social injustice and the answer to the problems they found not in any supernatural power rather they had the realization that all humans are equal and human being itself is the supreme and therefore one should uphold the dignity of human, worship the qualities of human beings, and that only could bring their emancipation. No supernatural power has any control over the fate of individual human being. Bengal having ruled by the formal procedure of rigid class and caste system for a very long period, produced an atmosphere of unsociability, rigid caste divisions, and consequently created severe social and human problems. Lalon Shah stood against the inhuman social atmosphere prevailing in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal for emancipating the socially degraded wretched people from of all kinds of social oppressions, disparity by changing the attitude of the rural mass towards life and living through his lyrical preaching and teachings.

### **9.1 British conquest of Bengal and its Impact**

Until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the history of Bengal was the history of dynastic changes and wars among different feudal nobility. These incidents had little or no impact on the life and living of the mass population of the land. Society and life and living of these people were almost static and uneventful. In 1757 with the conquest of Bengal by the British East India Company, and later taking over of Indian administration by the British imperial power in 1855 led to unprecedented changes that consequently gave birth to societal upheavals and movements in Bengal and later throughout India. These movements continued for the entire period of 19<sup>th</sup> century that finally resulted in the Partition of India in 1947. Except the British, all other conquerors of India as Marx and other Historians observed could conquer the land with their superior war skill, but their technology was inferior to that of the conquered population of India. As a result, these outside conquerors gradually lost their own cultural domination over their subjects rather to a great extent accepted the life pattern, religious ideas of the conquered population. British imperial power was the first conqueror of India, who had superior technology than that of the Indians. As a result, the conquest of India by the British was not simply the change in state administration as were the cases with other foreign conquerors of India, rather the impacts were massive. British conquest in course of its nearly 200 years of colonial rule, left both positive and negative effects on the social structure of Indian subcontinent of which Bengal

Presidency was a part. The impact of British rule was first felt in the province of Bengal because this was the part of India from where England began its colonial journey. Marx remarked, “All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, were strangely complex, rapid, and destructive as the successive action in Hindostan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history”(Marx, K.). The changes and developments that took place particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal could well be termed as a direct consequences of the British conquest of India. “England” as viewed by Marx was the “...unconscious tool of History in bringing about that revolution”. In Indian society Marx further stated “England has to fulfill a double mission .... One destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia...”

Marx further viewed under the new imperial rule of Britain “the political unity of India became more consolidated, and extending farther than it ever did under the Great Moguls, was the first condition of its regeneration. That unity, imposed by the British sword, will now be strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph. The native army, organized and trained by the British drill-sergeant, was the sine qua non of Indian self-emancipation, and of India ceasing to be the prey of the first foreign intruder. The free press, introduced for the first time into Asiatic society, and managed principally by the common offspring of Hindoos and Europeans, is a new and powerful agent of reconstruction”

But ironically the destructive role of British rule was more rapid and harmful compared to that of the regenerating role of British conquest. Marx stated “The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore, accessible to Hindoo civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by leveling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins”.

Thus the colonial rule of East India Company in Bengal mostly impacted negatively and completely devastated the social fabrics of the country, firstly, by depleting the authority and the status of former ruling classes under Moghul rule comprised of both Hindus and Muslims,

secondly, British rule at the same time destroyed the economic base of the country and finally by, creating a new aristocracy by annihilating the old Mughal ruling elites with ownership of land, a system which was unknown in this country. In the process, the British rule formerly could create a flunky broker class who in the language of Lord Maculay 'will be Indian in physical stature and color but mentally they will be British.' Combining impacts of these developments were unprecedented and has been labeled by Lathrop Staddard as the policy of 'pacific penetration' by Western imperialism. This policy ultimately created many social and economic changes and anomalies especially in the rural life of Bengal.

At the same time British rulers replaced Farsi by introducing English as the official language. This measure compelled the Muslims to step down from different official positions in which they had been working. Further, introduction of permanent settlement act of 1793 by the British rulers created a new landed aristocracy with ownership rights in land formerly unknown in Bengal. History tells us, the introduction of Permanent settlement and the creation of new zamindars, have had a tremendous negative impact on the mass population of Bengal and consequently a severe famine grasped the whole of Bengal which in history is known as 'Chiattarer Mannantar'(The famine of 76). Almost two third population of Bengal had wiped out due to this famine. These events resulted in number of armed mass upsurges against the British rule throughout Bengal.

All these measures by the British colonial rulers, paved the way for the emergence of new feudal nobility in Bengal. To serve the commercial interests of the British imperial power, the City of Kolkata gradually developed under the patronage of the new rulers in India, Centering Kolkata an English educated Hindu middle class surfaced in Bengal, who were basically the products of Permanent Settlement Act and a class which was formerly unknown. The collective effect of wealth and education created social awakening among the urban Hindu upper class residents of Kolkata. Different social and political institutions, organizations developed in Kolkata under the leadership of the newly educated Hindu middle class created by the British rulers. Institutions like Hindu Mela, National Congress, Brahmmo Samaj etc played key roles in creating national awakening among the newly educated Hindu aristocracy and also patronized to promote education and knowledge among urban population of Kolkata. During this period of history, Raja Rammohun Roy, introduced and established Brahmmo religious movement. Social reform movements by Viddyasagar and Rammohun also got momentum during the same period.

Favorable wind started propelling in the arena of art and literature of Bengal centering Kolkata. The educational, political, social, cultural, literature, religious life, of Bengal became illuminated with the appearance of personalities like Rammohun (1772-1830), Radhakanta Dev(1783-1867), Derojjio(1809-1831), Debendranath Thakur(1817-1905), Bidhyasagar(1820-1891), Modhushudan Dutta (1824-1873), Akkbya Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), Ramkrishna Poromhansa (1836-1886), Keshob Chandra (1838-1884), Bankimchandra(18938-1894) and later Rabindranath Thakur. The initiatives taken by urban educated elite turned into social movements.

## **9.2 Social movements in Colonial Bengal**

The colonial rule in Bengal resulted in the surfacing of several social movements; both rural and urban. In fact the whole of 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of the social movements, the revolutions, the riots, and the uprisings; across the entire Indian subcontinent in general and Bengal society in particular. History depicts the power of the protesters and how these movements manifested most clearly in the Indian society as a whole and in the life and living of Bengali mass population in particular. .The uprisings and revolutions in the Bengal was a defining period for the region and for the rest of India. Since the conquest of Bengal by the East India Company in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the socio, political and cultural scenario of the country started changing rapidly. Within a span of 100 years, Indian society started feeling the impact of changes that brought about by the British for firmly establishing their colonial rule in this land. Since Bengal province was conquered first by the British, the impact of British conquest was heavy on the life and living of the population in this province of India. In 1857, after the completion of 100 years rule by the East India Company, the feudal nobility of India attempted to snatch power from the British under the leadership of Mughol ruler Bahadur Shah. This attempt to overthrow East India Company is known as great Sepoy Mutiny in History. But British successfully could suppress the revolt and after the revolt was subsided by force, British Imperial Government took over the Indian administration directly and thus colonial rule was firmly established. British Government, as already has mentioned above, for its own administrative purpose, introduced several measures that created great social upheaval.

Marx stated that though British actions in India undertaken with an aim of benefiting British capitalists, would nevertheless lay the basis for far reaching changes. Thus he says: "All that the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social

condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but of their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?" (NYDT, August 8, 1853 as quoted in Encyclopedia Britannica). Completing his argument, Marx adds, "The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Indians themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether." Fakir Lalon Shah was born in this juncture of British colonial rule in Bengal.

### 9.3 Lalon Shah and his activities

It is difficult to ascertain where and when Lalon was born. But from some popular social adage a sketch on Fakir Lalon Shah's social background could be drawn. Some sporadic written documentary evidences about the same are also available. When Fakir Lalon died in 1890, a local fortnightly magazine, '*Hitokari*' edited by great litterateur Mir Mosharraf Hossain, carried out an essay on Fakir Lalon Shah titled 'Mahatma Lalon Fakir.' In this article it was written "it is very hard to get substantial evidence to write his biography. He did not disclose anything about himself. His disciples either due to their ignorance or for prohibition by Lalon Fakir decline to say anything about him. But it is believed that Lalon was a *Kaestho* by caste. Members of *Bhoumic* family of Chapara under Kushtia are his relatives. None of his relatives is alive. There is a saying that once on his way to pilgrimage, Lalon got infected by chicken pox and was abandoned by his fellow companions. He was rescued by a Muslim family and with their affectionate care Lalon recovered from ailment and at the end establish himself as a Fakir. In his face chicken pox took its toll with deep spots. He passed his last breath on 17<sup>th</sup> October at the age of 116 years."(Choudhury. A. A;2009; p. 718).

Taking into consideration the information of '*Hitokari*, "he passed his last breath at the age of 116" Lalon's birth year could be guessed as 1774. But there is no proof or evidence about the actual age of death of Lalon.

In 1872, Kangal Harith the editor of *Grambartaprokashika*, first brought Lalon into lime light to the readers. In an essay titled *Jati*, Harinath mentioned Lalon, as a **Kaestho**. He wrote that "Everyone know the names of religious sects '*Brahmma*' and '*Dharma Sabha*'. People of lower

castes have started to follow another cult named *Gour Sobha*. It has no particular place for gathering. Leaders of Gour cult arrange the gathering at any open space of the village and discuss the verses written on life and teaching of Sree Chaitanya Dev alias Gouranga the great. They do not believe in caste and class disparity. All the members of lower and higher caste sit together, eat together and pray together. Lalon Shah, a **Kaestho**, has started preaching another religion.(Hossain. A. I; p.25). From the above statement by Kangal Harinath we can get some important hints on Lalon Shah such as:

1) Lalon Shah was the introducer of a new religion. It is mentionable here that between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in the then Nadiya district, some folk religions surfaced having substantial influence on general mass. Kartabhaja, Sahebhdhani and Balahari are noteworthy among those and we have discussed about these cult religions in the previous chapter. Lalon actually did not initiate any such movements rather he revived one such cult movement ‘Baul’ that was initiated in 17<sup>th</sup> century. I have already discussed about the origin of Baul movement earlier. One common goal of all these folk religions was to uphold the dignity of human being.

2) Along with other parallel folk religions, Baulism under Lalon rapidly could spread influence on the common people that gradually became a threat for the existing ruling religions. Consequently the elite class of the society became worried and anxious about the activities of the Bauls in Bengal.

3) Lalon Shah had a charismatic personality and the essence of his philosophy was to uphold the highness of human beings. These philosophical tenets of Lalon, also attracted the educated persons as well as the men of free thinking.

4) Kangal mentioned Lalon as a **Kaestho** by caste.

Ten years later after Lalon’s death in the year 1900, in ‘The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay’ vol-V., No.4, 1900, page-217 an article was published by Abdul Wali, entitled ‘On some curious Tenets and Practices of a Certain Class of Faquirs of Bengal’. In this article Abdul Wali commented:

“Another renowned and most melodious versifier who’s Doha’s are the expressions of inner feelings of the lower classes and are sung by boatmen and others, was Lalon Shah.

He was a disciple of Siraj Shah and both were born in the village Harispur, Sub-division Jhenidah, District Jessore.

After long travelling and performing pilgrimages to Jagannath Dham and other shrines, meeting all sorts of devotees, Lalon at last settled at Mauza Siuriya, near the sub-divisional headquarters of Kushtia, of Nadiya district. In Siuriya, Lalon established an Akhra in which he used to perform his religious performances. He was known as a **kaestha** and died in this place some ten years ago. His disciples are many and his songs are numerous.”(Hossain. A. I; 2015; p, 555).

Henceforth, a trend began to uncover Lalon’s caste and religion. This attempt diverted the research works on Lalon into a wrong track. Scholars being divided into two groups became entangled in academic debates in determining the caste and religious identity of Lalon. Dr. S. M. Lutfar Rahman, Shah Lalif Afi Anhu (ex-secretary of east Bengal Baul Samatee), Dr. Khondoker Riyazul Hoque think Lalon as Muslim by birth. . They attempted to establish that the name of Lalon’s father was Daribullah and mother’s name was Amena. On the other hand, Moulavi Abdul Wali, Matilal Das, Sree Basanta Kumar Paul, Dr. Anowarul Karim, Abul Ahsan Choudhury are of opinion that Lalon Shah was basically born in a Hindu family and his father’s name was Madhab Kar and mother was Padmabati. Besides, scholars like Jatindranath Sen Gupta, Muhammad Munsur Uddin, Poet Jasim Uddin, Sudhir Chakrabarti also decreed that Lalon was a Hindu by birth, but for some unavoidable circumstances he was converted to Islam. But interestingly Lalon’s close disciples could not give any reliable information on Lalon’s caste and descend.

Lalon’s had an enigmatic life. A lot of questions had evolved centering his descend, caste, religion and family life even during his life time. But nothing could unknot the riddle. In his lifetime and after his death those questions sometimes overshadowed his philosophy. In his lifetime, Lalon repeatedly had to face the question about his caste and religion. But neither Lalon nor his disciples, had ever disclosed his religious identity.

Lalon himself could be made responsible for the creation of such controversy. He did not make it clear to public about his religious background. In his lifetime when Lalon was asked about his caste and descend he said,

‘Everybody asks, ‘What religion does Lalon follow?’



Lalon says, 'I have never been able to formulate an outward appearance of religion.

When a male is circumcised,  
he is said to be a Muslim,  
but what rule applies to women?

We recognize a brahmin  
by the sacred thread he wears;  
but how am I to recognize a brahmin woman?'

Lalon Shah had deep hatred towards the attitude of the society concerning his caste and descend particularly about his religious belief. Whenever he was asked about his religion he felt annoyed and answered vaguely:

Everybody inquires Lalon's religion  
Whether he is Hindu or Muslim  
Lalon says I do not know what religion I possess.

Every man comes and goes across  
With the same boat by the same boatman  
But none bothers for discriminate among them  
Question is how one is different from others?

'*Hitokori*' hinted out some interesting points about Lalon's religious belief. *Hitokori* disclosed that Lalon himself did not follow any institutional religion, but the followers of all religions considered him as the member of their own caste. He was so much closely affiliated to Muslim community that people used to think him as the member of Muslim community. Followers of Hindu religion mistook him as the follower of *Vaishnava* because of his free mixing with the followers of *Vainavism*. He did not support caste system. It is not surprising to mistake him as the believer of Brahma for his belief in formless god. He practiced guruism with deep devotion. It is noteworthy that, his disciples consider nothing more important than paying homage to Lalon. They always utter 'Sain' as their verbal holy speech".(ibid. p.540). This comment of Hitokori made the riddle on Lalon's religious belief more complex.

As mentioned earlier, Kangal Harinath Mojumder was the person who first brought Lalon into limelight. But initially he was a little bit sarcastic in introducing Lalon to the public though later Harinath became his bosom followers. Harinath introduced Lalon as the preacher of a new religion that was all out against Hindu caste system and as such caste Hindus went against Lalon. But at one stage when Kangal Harinath became a close associate of Lalon, he reintroduced Lalon to his readers with dignity and portrayed him as a saint. Harinath glorified Lalon by comparing his character with that of Hazrat Mohammad (sm). Harinath in his book *Brahmanda Ved* (chapter 1<sup>st</sup>, 1885-1890) remarked ‘If anybody suppose that After Mohammed no holy saint appeared in the Muslim religion, we nullify the idea and assert that many holy saints had sanctified Muslim sect; One of them is Lalon Shah of Nadiya (now Kushtia). His Guru (religious master) was also a high Yogi of high esteem and saint as well.’ (Hossain. A. I. 2016;p. 22).

One may raise question about the dubious role of Kangal in describing the religious identity of Lalon Shah. In 1872 Kangal Harinath first introduced Lalon in his Grambarta Prokashani as a Kaestho, but that was his guess work. However; later on, when he became close to Lalon , portrayed him as a *Shiddho* yogi that put a hint that Lalon was a Muslim.

Sree Basanta Kumar Paul, wrote a complete essay on Lalon Shah titled ‘Fakir Lalon Shah’ which was published in `Probashi Protrika in 1332 B. S. In that essay Mr. Paul explained, ‘Sainji was born in the famous Kar family of Chapara and belonged to Kaestho descend. This Chapara village is situated on the bank of the river Gouri (Gorai) in the present day Kushtia district. His father’s name was Madhab Kar. Lalon in his very early boyhood lost his father. Mr. Paul further wrote; Lalon’s maternal grandfather’s name was Bhasma Das. Bhasma Das was blessed with two sons and three daughters. Name of his two sons were Krisna Das and Raju Das and he had another three daughters named Radhamoni, Narayani and Padmabati. Lalon was the son of Padmabati. His surname was Lalon Kar.(ibid; p. 25).

Similarly, Mohd. Abu Talib, claimed that Lalon Fakir was a Muslim by birth. He discovered two sale deeds accomplished in favor of Lalon in 1881 and 1882. Based on these two deeds Abu Talib claimed that Lalon Shah was a Muslim in religious belief. In the deeds there were some hints about Lalon Shah’s religious identity. The deeds mentioned that Lalon in his lifetime purchased five bighas of land in Shailakopa where now the shrine of Shukur Shah, one of the principal disciple of Lalon Shah, is situated. The deed disclosed following information about Lalon Shah:

Recipient of the deed:-

Sree Lalon Sain

Son of Late Siraj Sain

Caste- Muslim

Profession- Beggary

Village- Cheure

Sub-Registry- Kumarkhali

Seller:-

Sree Pran Nath Saha

and

Sree Baidya Nath Saha

Son of Sree Har Chandra Saha

and

Sree Uma Charan Saha

Caste- both of them belong to Oilman caste

Profession- Talukdary (Land Lord)

Village-Fulhari

Sub Registry Office- Shailokupa.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. S. M. Lutfar Rahman also claimed Lalon as a Muslim. He criticized the opinion of Muhammad Munsur Uddin the pioneer researcher on Lalon and questioned “if somebody intentionally tries to establish a wrong idea, can that be accepted as a truth. He further stated Lalon Shah was a Muslim by birth and this truth cannot be nullified based on some wrong notions. Dr. Lutfar Rahaman further claimed that Lalon was born in Harishpur under Jessore district not in Bharara. In support of his claim Dr. Rahaman mentioned Duddu Shah’s manuscript and Wali’s article, both carries specimen of that truth (ibid. p.30). Dr. Lutfur Rahaman discovered a manuscript written by Duddu Shah, one of the principal disciple of Lalon Shah, where it was clearly written that Lalon was born in a Muslim family on 1<sup>st</sup> Kartik in 1179 B.S. His father’s name was Daribullah Dewan and mother’s name was Amina Khatun. His grandfather’s name was Golam Kader who lived in the village Harishpure under Jenidah subdivision under Jessor District. (Ref Dao) The manuscript says,  
Egarosho uno ashi Kartiker pohela

Harishpur grame sainer agoman hoila.  
Jessore jeladhin Jhenaidah koi  
Ukto mohokomadhin Harishpur hoi.  
Golam Kader hon dadaji tahar  
Bangsho parampora bas Harishpur majhar.  
Daribullah Dewan tar abbajir naam  
Amina Khatun mata ebe prokashilam.

### **Translation**

Sain (Lalon) appeared in the village Harishpur  
of Jenaidah subdivision under jessore district  
On the 1<sup>st</sup> Kartik of 1179 B.S  
Golam Qader is his grandfather  
His father's name is Daribullah Dewan  
And his mother's name is Amina Khatun  
They lived Harishpur descends after descends.

But this manuscript has been challenged as unauthentic by some later researchers. Ironically even after the death of Lalon Shah, researchers are in constant debate about Lalon's religious identity and each group claims Lalon as believer of their own religious faith.

A story prevails among the people that Lalon Shah was born in a Hindu family. From early boyhood Lalon showed his lyrical talent and for this reason he was very popular among the fellow villagers. Lalon lost his father in boyhood. His widowed mother had to face very hard time for earning their living. When Lalon reached at his adolescent, he set out for a pilgrimage with his neighbors. When Lalon and his fellow journeymen were returning from pilgrimage, Lalon fell seriously sick from chicken pox infection. At one stage the ailment became serious and Lalon fell unconscious. Assuming Lalon had died, his companions floated him in the river water on a raft made of banana tree. After a long drift Lalon, reached at a ghat of the river Kaliganga near Kushtia. Malam Karigar, a local weaver rescued him and gave him necessary palliative care and treatment. Within few days he became cured but lost his left eye due to pox. After remedy, Lalon Shah returned to his family. But meanwhile, his pilgrimage companions had spread that Lalon died of pox and they had completed his funeral ceremony. His widowed mother and his young wife believing the news of Lalon's death had accomplished all obsequies.

Sudden appearance of Lalon was a pleasant surprise for the family, but the social leaders and his neighbors were not happy. The reason was according to Hindu religious faith, if anybody takes food from a Muslim, he loses his caste and finally he, who loses his caste, became an outcaste. For this reason, Lalon was not accepted by his neighbors and society. Due to social pressure, Lalon's mother and his wife also disagreed to accept him in their family. Lalon Shah was very much shocked and disheartened at this and returned back to the Muslim family who gave him care and affections. There, in Malam Karigar's (weaver) house. Lalon started to dwell and met Siraj Sain, his spiritual master. It is needed to mention that this is common story, a heresy about Lalon.

Malam Karigar is a very important character in Lalon's life.. Malam Karigar donated five acres of land to Lalon. Later Lalon erected his Akhra on the land. His shrine was built here. Undoubtedly behind the success of Lalon, Malam Shah and his neighbors (weaver community) played very significant roles. They gave Lalon all kinds of supports and protections.

Prominent researcher on Lalon, Abul Ahsan Choudhury remarked in his book 'Lalon Shah' "... he got all sorts of supports and assistance of this weaver community. With their assistance and donations Lalon Shah established his Akhra Bari. Lalon began his family life by marrying a woman from the weaver community. It was a weaver majority area. The weaver community had great respect for Lalon Shah. In fact their all assistance and love paved the path of success for Lalon."(ibid; p. 31).

In another story it was stated that when Lalon was about to die due to pox infection, Siraj Sain rescued him from the river water and gave him necessary care to get remedy. Later on Lalon started his new family life. While staying with Siraj Sain, Lalon became influenced by him. When Lalon was 25 years old, Siraj Sain died. After the death of Siraj Sain, Lalon started travelling to different holy places. Finally at the age of 47 after travelling various parts of Bengal and India, in 1823 he established an Akhra bari at Chheuriya, of Kushtia sub Division(Now a district of Bangladesh) in Nadia District and settled down there. (Sharif. A. 2009; p. 156). All these are nothing but heresy. As we have mentioned earlier, Lalon Shah did not leave any hint about his life. Only in a stanza of his lyric there is a little hint but that is also controversial. In that lyric Lalon said,

গুরু তুমি পতিত পাবন পরম ঈশ্বর

অখ- ম-লাকারাং ব্যাপ্তং যেন চরাচর ।।

ব্রহ্মা, বিষ্ণু শিব তিনে  
ভজে তোমায় নিশিদিনে  
আমি জানি নাকো তোমা বিনে  
তুমি গুরু পরংপর ।।  
ভজে যদি না পাই তোমায়  
এ দোষ আমি দিব বা কার  
আমার নয়ন দুটি তোমার উপর  
যা কর তুমি এবার ।।  
আমি লালন এস সিঁড়ে  
ভাই বন্ধু নাই আমা জোড়ে  
ভুগেছিলাম পক্ষ জ্বরে  
মলম শাহ করেন উদ্ধার ।<sup>২</sup>

### **Translation**

Guru, you are the real sanctifier of the fallen fellow  
Your presence is overshadowed the whole earth  
And You are a real God for the fellow.

All goddess like Brahma, Bisnu and Shiva  
Always pay their homage and worship to You  
But I do not bother for anything but Your love and affection  
I profess Guru, You, only You are almighty.

If I do not get Your blessing paying my homage and worship  
Whom do I condemn for that misfortune?  
I yield myself only on You  
You can do whatever You Wish.

I, Lalon am the only offspring of my parents  
I have no sister and brother  
I was attacked by the chicken pox

*Malam Shah* rescued me.

‘Lalon Sain Er Gaan’ A compilation of Lalon’s songs edited by Shakti Nath Jha carries in the same stanza of the same lyric in signature line that,

আমি লালন এস সিঁড়ে  
ভাই বন্ধু নাই আমা জোড়ে  
ভুগেছিলাম পক্ষ জ্বরে  
সিরাজ শাহ করেন উদ্ধার ।°

I, Lalon am the only offspring of my parents  
I have no sister and brother  
I was attacked by the chicken pox  
Siraj Shah rescued me.

However, it is quite a difficult task to ascertain the savior of Lalon - Siraj Sain or Malam Shah. I personally discussed the matter with many other Lalon's followers and *Shaudhus* (Holy men). Most of them referred me to the above lyric where Siraj Shah was stated as the rescuer of Lalon. Besides, Lalon Shah often mentioned Siraj Shah as his Guru. Lalon was a follower in Guruism. To him Guru was the Supreme Being, Guru was the guide of life, causes of all happiness and sorrows, delight and pleasure without whose mercy no one can get nearer to God. In another word to Lalon Guru is next to God. Lalon says,

মুরশিদ বিনে কি ধন আর আছে রে মন এ জগতে ।।

যে নাম স্মরণে হরে, তাপিত অঙ্গ শীতল করে

ভব-বন্ধন জ্বালা যায় রে দূরে

জপ ঐ নাম দিবারাতে ।।

মুরশিদের চরণ-সুধা, পান করিলে যাবে ক্ষুধা

কর নারে দেলে দ্বিধা, যেহি মুরশিদ সেহি খোদা

ভজ ওলিয়েম মুরশিদা

আয়াত লেখা কোরানেতে ।।

আপনি আল্লাহ আপনি নবী, আপনি হন সে আদম সফী

অনন্তরূপ করে ধারণ, কে বোঝে তাঁর লীলার কারণ

নিরাকারে হাকিম নিরাঞ্জন

মুরশিদরূপ ওই ভজন পথে ।।

কুল্লো সাঁই মোহিত আর, আলা কুল্লো সাইন কাদির

পড় কালাম নিহাজ কর, তবে সব জানতে পার

কেন লালন ফাঁকে ফের

ফকির নাম পাড়াও মিথ্যে ।

## **Translation**

Without Murshid who is your so kind friend in this world

By remembering whose name, O my mind

Burning heart becomes soothed

And all agonies and miseries go far away

Recite this graceful name continuously.

If you drink the nectar of the feet of Murshid

All kinds of hungers and starvations will be perish away

Do not hesitate to accept it that the Murshid and God are the same being

Vest your unimpeachable prayer to the Murshid

It is even instructed in the holy Quran.

He demonstrate Himself in different time as different

Being as Allah, as the Prophet and as Adam

Who one can understand this enigma?

He is invisible to feel but for getting worship

He reveals Himself within Murshid figure.

He is everywhere and everything is the reflection of His eternal beauty

Learn the sermon<sup>4</sup>with well comprehension

Then you can be able to unknot the secret

Why you, fool Lalon are wandering in wrong path

And dignify yourself as Fakir not obeying to Murshid.

Some researches and followers, on the other hand believe that, during his severe illness due to attack of pox, Lalon Shah was rescued by Malam Karigar and Motizan Fakirani the wife of Malam Karigar. They first discovered the unconscious Lalon Shah on the river bank of Kaliganga and setting aside all fears of contiguous disease they rescued Lalon and gave necessary treatment. The couple was childless and thus adapted Lalon as their son. Malam Shah in Lalon's life played the role like his father. He gave Lalon part of his land property and necessary protection. It was Malam Sha who put Lalon in the hand of Siraj Shah for learning proper spiritual lessons. Siraj Shah was a palanquin-bearer and a relative of Malam shah. He used to visit Malam Shah's house regularly. Lalon in course of time became a disciple of Siraj Shah in the Malam Shah's house. All these are heresy.



What I am trying to say is that, the trend of the researchers have been to portray Lalon as Hindu or Muslim in their own way of thinking. This is the reason, why identity of Lalon did still remain ambiguous and controversial. Some researchers came up with a theory that Lalon Shah was born in Hindu family but later he was converted to Islam and till his death Lalon dwelled with Muslim community and married a Muslim wife. Amongst them Upendra Nath Bhatyacharya, Mohammad Munsur Uddin, Sudhir Chakraborti are noteworthy.

About the origin of Lalon we may depend on the research work of Sudhir Chakraborti. His analysis is 'Lalon' could be the penname of the sage. For some reasons, Lalon did not use his original name. This trend is not uncommon in world history. For example, Maxim Gorki was the family name of the famous writer. It was his penname. Sudhir Chokraborti also cited some examples from Lalon's contemporary popular figures those were famous in their pen names. For example, the followers of Kartabhoja one of the cultic religions of Bengal believed that, a Fakir Awul Chand suddenly appeared in Ghoshpara village and started preaching his religious doctrines. But nobody knew what was his real identity and from where did he appear. People believed that Awul Chand was a Muslim by birth, but he believed in Vaisnavism. Legend says that Awul Chand hide his real name and made him known as Awul Chand to his followers. This trend of hiding one's own identity was common among the cult preachers of Bengal. These preachers consciously wanted to keep their identity undisclosed to general people possibly for deceiving their followers and mass people. They loved to remain shrouded by mystery so that people become curios about them. Like Awul Chand, legend prevails about the preacher of another minor folk religion 'Shaheb Dhani'. The legend describes though the preachers was a Muslim by birth, but he was the real incarnation of Raidhini of Brojodham. By this way Islam was encoded with Vaishnavism. Similar trends of creating myths about the preachers, their life, birth place, appearance were common among all cultic religions. Sudhir Ckokraborti noticing this common characteristic of all folk religions especially of those in Nadiya region, came to a conclusion that Lalon might also had hide his real identity under his penname. But this is just a hypothesis.

In this way, Fakir Lalon Shah became a most elusive character in the history of cult religions of Bengal. Scholars and researchers turned secular Lalon into a sectarian figure in their writings. During my discussion with Lalon's followers, some devotees with great regret sometimes uttered 'let Lalon remain an outcaste. Please do not put him within the cage of any religious belief or do

not judge him from any religious viewpoint. Sir, when Lalon, himself did not want to be sectarian, why do you want to make him that?’

Lalon’s preaching is often referred as religious cult. It was Kangal Harinath Mojumder who first mentioned Lalon’s preaching as tenets of new religion. Obviously the question may arise whether Lalon’s doctrine could be considered as religion. Did Lalon want to preach a new religion? This is a vital question. In 1909 A.D. poet Rabindranath Tagore in his speech said; “I am very curious about the life history of the preachers of minor religions. When I travel in rural areas of Bengal, I notice some sages preaching their sermons by their personal endeavor. They are not always been accepted by the civil society, but my personal opinion is, we should pay heed to their preaching, and if we could do so, then we would understand that how these minor religions left their impacts on the social structure in Indian subcontinent. I know about one of such religious preachers. His name is Lalon Fakir... .. Lalon Fakir by amalgamating Islam and Zionism made such a syncretized religious idea that mesmerizes us.” Sudhir Chokrabarti in view of the characteristics of folk religions termed Lalonism as a folk religion. He viewed that prejudices and various other legends were encoded in folk religions deeply. But Lalonism/Baulism is an exception to that. Lalon and his followers no one wanted to project the prejudices and charismatic power. (Chaktaborti. S.1992; p.204).

Lalon Shah, was a man of very modern outlook. He, like preachers of other folk religions, did never claim that he is bestowed with super natural power and was capable of settling all kinds of earthly and spiritual problems of his followers. He was a functional philosopher. He believed that the result of anything depends on one’s own action not on any super natural power. Now question comes why a personality like Lalon did never portrayed him as a Muslim or Hindu or as a member of any other religion? Was that an attempt to project himself as a supernaturally powered person or to make him a legend?

Researcher failed to settle down the controversy rather made it more complex. Attempts to portray Lalon Shah as Hindu or Muslim, failed to unveil the sectarian identity of him. Lalon Shah was a very famous personality in his time. His name and fame was widespread throughout Bengal and many people from different regions of Bengal province became his followers.

## 9.4 Conclusion

Prominent poet of Bangladesh Al Mahmud in his book ‘Kobir Kor Rekha’ said “if we want to unveil the real essence of poems of any poet, first we should study the life style of the poet.” In view of this, we may look at the life and living of Lalon and his contemporary society in which he lived and worked. We have stated earlier that Lalon was born in 1774 and died in 1890. We do not know where Lalon spent his boyhood, but Lalon settled down in Chheuria and started his activities from 1790 after being rescued by Malam Shah. Fakir Anowar Hoosain (Montu) Shah(now deceased ) in an interview told me that, when Lalon was rescued from the river Kaliganga, by Malam Shah, at that time Lalon was approximately of 16 years old. But researchers claim that Lalon erected his Akhra in Chheuria in 1823. If we consider 1774 as the birth year of Lalon, then, it can be concluded that Lalon’s life time was from the last part of eighteenth century and he lived during the whole period of nineteenth century.

The former subdivision of Kushtia (now kushtia district of Bangladesh) where Lalon was stationed, was under Nadiya district of undivided India. Nadiya was very famous for its literarily and educational activities. Nadiya was also famous as the birth place of great scholar of medieval Bengal Sree Chaitanya.

It is supposed that the name Nadiya derives from Nabadweep. Mention of Nabadweep could be found in Chaitanyabhagbata written by Krishnadas Kabiraj:

Nabadweep heno gram tribhubane nai

Jatha Obotirno hoilo Chaitanya Gosai.

### Translation

There is no other village like Nabadweep

Where Chaitanya Gosain appeared.

Some presume that Nadiya was the combined name of nine Dip or islands i.e. Antadip the birth place of Sree Chaitanya, Seamantadip, Godrumadip and Madhyadip Koldip, Rhitudip, Moddrumdip, Jannudip and Ruddradwip. Kumudnath Mollik in his book Nadiya Kahini stated that in ancient period lamp was called as Diya in Bengal. This Diya along with ‘Na’ meaning ‘nine’ together formed the word Nadiya. It is believed by the scholar that before human settlement Nadiya emerged as a *shoal* inside the river Ganges. At one stage a cynic Tantrik had lit nine lamps as the part of his Tantric practice in the shoal. The boatmen crossing the river Ganges in night could see the lights of these nine lamps and gradually the started calling the

shoal as *Nadiyar Char*. Later on when people started settling down in the shoal *Nadiyar Char* in course of time turned into Nadiya.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Nadiya's social environment became infested with religious prejudices, bigotry and social discriminations. The Nadiya society was stratified into different castes and classes. Different evil customs such as Satee, polygamy and human sacrifices were rampant in Nadiya like other parts of Indian subcontinent.

Kushtia, where Lalou established his Akhra, was under Nadiya district. We have stated earlier that Lalou started his career as a sage in the village Seuria, under Kumarkhali Thana of Kushtia subdivision. The then Kushtia subdivision was comprised of six Thanas. They are Doulatpure, Noyapara, Kushtia, Kumarkhali, Valuk and Vaduria. Among these six Thanas, Kumarkhali was a famous commercial place and was under Tagore Zamindary. The area of Kumarkhali was 110 sq. miles. Village Seuria was 7 miles away from Thana headquarter of Kumarkhali. It was a large center of cottage based weaving industries. There was a Neelkuthi in Kumarkhali and he head office of 52 Neelkuthis in and around Kumarkhali was also established there. Darawakanath Tagore established Neelkuthi at Kumarkhali. There was a silk industry at Kumarkhali as well. In the second decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kumarkhali was connected with Kolkata by rail. This Railway link impacted tremendously on the life and living of the people in the area. Importance of Kumarkhali as commercial place was enhanced. Kumarkhali earned its fame as Manchester of Bengal. Weavers of Kumarkhali started producing different kinds of cloths which could fetch big market not only within Bengal but also in England. At Kumarkhali there was a silk Kuthi (an office and residence of high official) of East India Company and local silk Kumarkhali fetched a very high price in London. Besides, demand of indigo from Kumarkhali as dye also had high demand in England.<sup>5</sup> Communicational infrastructural development gradually turned Kumarkhali into an urban center. Kungal Harinath Majumder, ventured to publish Grambarta Prokashika in 1861. In his paper Kungal mentioned about Kumarkhali's cultural and commercial importance. In fact, Kumarkhali from long past was rich in education, literature and cultural activities. Renowned researcher Dr. Abul Ahsan Choudhury says that Kumarkhali from past has been a place for educational, cultural and literary activities. Even in Mughal rule, there were plenty of Tols (school for Sanskrit teaching), Maktabas (School for Arabic teaching) and primary schools in the area. In British era Tols established by Chandrakumar Tarkabagish and Satinath Bhushan were very famous. In British period like

Kolkata, the spread of English education could notably be viewed in Kumarkhali. In the first four decades of nineteenth century for spread of English education a high school was established named M.N School which got government approval in 1856. Some initiatives for spreading of women education in Kumarkhali could also be viewed. In fact Kumarkhali though was a remote place, but it was not backward like other parts of rural Bengal in British India. Lalon's society was in fact booming with different folk cultural activities. Educational scenario was full of different activities. Lalon;s activities spread in an enlightened environment of Kumarkhali. Fakir Lalon Shah was the product of that society and he inherited his musical talent from the soil.

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## CHAPTER 10

### Lalon Shah and Baul Movement

#### 10.0 Introduction

Of late there has been a perceptible trend in Bangladesh to present the *Bauls* and their songs as merely a segment of the folk culture of Bengal, albeit one with a much larger fanfare than the others, presented for the entertainment of the sophisticated urban audience. In the process their popular philosophic tradition of providing a heretic counterpoint to the sectarian scholastic scriptures of both Hindu and Islamic religious establishments, is often forgotten. The isolated presentation of the *baul as well as Lalon's* songs render their underlying philosophic allusions meaningless; the audience remains uninitiated to the compositions' consistent negation, in an aesthetically discreet manner, of the bondage of any institutional religion down the centuries at the grass-root level.

The land that is now Bangladesh from historical past once had been considered as a prohibited zone for the people of other parts of Indian subcontinent. The original inhabitants of this land or the 'Bhumiputras' the 'Kol', Mundas' 'Kirats' and so on lived almost a secluded life having their own tradition and culture. Like other tribal groups, ancient people of Bengal were also lived in a communal harmonious life among themselves without the presence of any caste and class divisions. The Aryans who conquered India coming from the west, termed the land of Bengal as a '*Pandav Biborjito Desh*' meaning a land where Pandvas hate to enter. Mughals termed the land Bengal as "*Dojakh pur Ajnana*" or a hell full of Bread. All these negative terms applied to portray Bengal was due to the fact that the land was inaccessible for its topographic features and was full of insects, serpents and dangerous animals, but at the same time it was very fertile producing different crops, fruits and other goods like fine clothing etc in abundance. Clan based population of Bengal lived in a communal harmony having no social class division among themselves. But at one point, the Aryan finally conquered the land, and gradually they introduced the rigid caste system. In particular during the time of Sena dynasty rigid caste division turned the original inhabitants into slaves of the conqueror and for years to come they remained subjugated, oppressed and tortured. As has been said earlier that, these people to escape from such oppressions of the foreign rulers, developed their own cultural life pattern in which they sought their own emancipation and thus, various cult based religious groups emerged in ancient Bengal. The basic theme of all these cultic religious ideas were emancipation of

human beings from the social injustice and the answer they sought not in any supernatural power rather they had the realization that all humans are equal and human being itself is the supreme and thus if something is to be worshipped that should be human being and nothing else. As such one should worship the humans only not any supernatural power. In a society ruled by the formal procedure of rigid class and caste system that created an atmosphere of unsociability, caste divisions, consequently created severe social and human problems in inhuman shape. Lalon Shah the most venerable preacher of Baulism, was a person who fought for the emancipation of all kinds of social disparity through his teachings and lyrics. Interestingly, Baul movement was not founded by Lalon himself. He inherited this Lokayata philosophical tradition of humanity and glorified the same by explaining the inner essence of human beings that Baulism uphold. Through his magical lyrics Lalon preached his philosophical sermons among subaltern population of rural Bengal to enkindle them against all sorts of social and religious discriminations, exploitations and bigotry of the upper class elites.

### **10.1 Lalon's Social Movement**

“Personal predispositions of an individual are not revealed by his culturally patterned responses, but by the deviation from the same”(Ralph Linton) . Born and brought up in the midst of orthodoxy and social injustice, Lalon Shah proved himself as a person who rather following his own cultural pattern, social norms and reasoning, created a new wave of ideas that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal not only rejuvenated the whole lower class population but also had intellectual influence on the educated gentry in rural and urban Bengal. Even after 125 years of his death Lalon is still considered as the icon of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. His preaching is still illuminating the oppressed mass to fight against all inequalities and social disparity. Prof Ahamed Sharif remarked “Baul Philosophy emerged from the soil of Bengal having all the traditions and cultural tenets of the subaltern population of the land, but it was nurtured under foreign cultural influence”. Prof. Sharif further stated,” if Baulism would have been a religious philosophy of the upper class population of Bengal, it would no doubt be the controlling force of cultural life pattern of the population at large. For its inner liberal humane essence, Baulism could have placed Bengal in a dignified position among the nations of the world” (Sharif,A 2009. p. 56).



Baulism reached its zenith under the leadership of Lalon Sha. It was revitalized under the teaching and preaching of Lalon that created a new trend in the social life of rural Bengal. Lalon's preaching created tremendous social as well as psychological impacts on the subaltern population of the Bengal in 19<sup>th</sup> century. A man of extraordinary dignity, Lalon emerged as a charismatic leader among the general mass of his society. His name and fame spread far distance crossing the boundary of his own locality. The *Hitokori* a fortnightly magazine published by Meer Mosharraf Hossain from Kushtia carried an essay on Lalon Shah in its issue of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1890 just after 14 days of Lalon's death. The article expressed that Lalon Fakir not only was well acquainted to everybody in his region only, but his name and fame also had spread even in East Chittagong, in North Rangpur, in South Jessore and in different parts of Bengal. Numerous people from different parts of Bengal became his disciples. We came to know that he left over ten thousand disciples. (Hossain, A.I p. 541).

A revolutionary in nature, Lalon during his life time actively protested against caste disparity, class oppression, social persecution and religious bigotry. Lalon's greatest contribution was his endeavor to bring social changes from within the society. He ignored the social and religious prejudices and at the same time he opposed social discriminations in the name of religion. Even he did not hesitate to declare himself as an outcaste by ignoring all aspects of institutional religions. Lalon lived a long life of almost 116 years. During his long passage of life, Lalon never disclosed his religious identity to anybody even to his dearest disciples too. When he was asked about his religion and caste; through his lyrics he replied:

Everybody inquires about the caste of Lalon

Lalon replies he cannot differentiate one caste from another.

If circumcision is the mark of a Muslim

What happens to its woman?

The Brahmin may be known by his sacred thread

But what about their women-folk?

Some wear a garland, others an amulet

Does that alone set apart a Hindu from a Muslim?

When they come to this world or depart?

When water is sheltered in a ditch

It is called water of a well; but

when it is mixed with sea it becomes part of the sea  
and is called sea water.

But both have the same origin

And is defined differently based on  
the container but it holds the same.

All speaks of greatness of caste

And vaunting its uniqueness

Lalon says, all talks are inconsequential

And evaporates like steam.

In the above verse Lalon criticized about accentuating on someone's racial identity and opposed differentiation on the basis of caste, class, creed and sex. Throughout his life Lalon fought against all sorts of sex disparity in the society. He strongly criticized caste system based on the concept of purity, pollution and birth that make differentiation between human beings. Lalon stated these all are man-made. He thus raised question about how man-made laws, ideas, could create divisions among human beings when all men are created by the same God. But men on their own created divisions among themselves in the name of caste, class, creed from time immemorial. Lalon says 'when God does not make any difference between men and men, than why in the name of caste we make disparity in the society'? Lalon expounds that, this social disparity is not righteous and Lalon's first revolt was against this caste system. He was more revolutionary than Martin Luther of Germany, W. Cliff of England and John Hash of Chekochlavekia who protested against the persecution of Church and Church based Christianity. (Sengupta;2010; p.450)

Caste system in Indian sub-continent has been in existence for thousands of years and the people of the lower strata of the society were its prey. From Vedic period till 19<sup>th</sup> century, caste based social stratification rigidly has been in existence among the Hindus in this sub-continent. Caste based society does not approve lower caste and class people to have minimum rights to live a decent social life. These low caste people are branded by the upper caste population as outcaste and treated like animals. From historic past, in Indian sub-continent this inhuman caste system has been ruling the Hindu population. Parimal Bhushan Kar quotes historian Basham in his book *Samajtatwa* "In India class stratification grew more rigid in the Vedic period, a situation that can

be compared with that of South Africa today where a dominant minority group, striving to maintain its superiority and purity over darker majority population. (Kar; P.B;2002; p-207).

History tells us that this land that we call Bangladesh today had a social setup consisting of different tribal groups in the ancient past. Social disparity in that stage was rarely existed. In the tribal social set up, the existence of social stratification based on profession and capabilities was visible, but caste system in its present form was totally absent. But from the advent of Aryans in the Vedic period, caste system replaced the old tribal social system in Indian society of which Bengal was a part. Aryan came to this country with their caste system with them. Initially, among the Aryans there existed three castes i.e Brahmin, Khattriya and Boishya. In a hymn of Rig Veda, caste system had been sketched from patriarchic view point. It says Brahmma-from whose mouth Brahmin, from hands Khattriyo and from thigh Boishya castes were created. (ibid). It is also stated in Sree Mat Bhogobat Geeta that caste system has been created based on the virtue of action and skin colour. God says that I have created four castes i.e Brahmin, Khattriyo, Boishya and Sudra based on virtue and division of labor.(ibid; page-209). Caste disparity in society was so severe that people of lower caste did not have minimum right and they could not even be portrayed as human at all. Higher castes of society, outcaste the lower caste.

Local non-Aryan people were mostly became the prey of this caste system. They were treated as slaves and untouchable creatures by the ruling class. Caste system was introduced by the Scripture- the Vedas and the Geeta and was legalized in society by the Manu Sanghita. Manu Sanghita decreed various injunctions and directions to materialize the spirit of caste system. It is Manusanghita which humiliated local people stating, 'A Sudra whether he is bought or not is compelled to do all inferior activities because he is born for serving Brahmins.(ibid) This disregards for the Sudras in Manusanghita could be termed as a disgrace for human history. As we know that with the beginning of human civilization social disparity and social discrimination evolved in society. At one stage, for gathering more personal property ruling class started to subjugate the people of lower class eventually which introduced slavery in society. Hitherto, it is noteworthy that slavery in every stage got acknowledgement and endorsement by the ruling class and religions. Slaves were hardly treated as man. Engel's stated "...in human society slavery was invented as a means of production" and every civilization stands on blood of the slaves.

In this way in the Indian society caste system had existed. As a consequence, lower and schedule caste did not have minimum right in society, they did not have right to utter the Sanskrit word

(which was considered as the Vedic language to the Hindu followers), if they did so their tongue was discarded. They did not have the right to hear the holy lessons of the Hindu scriptures, if they heard, hot melting lead was poured into their earhole to make them deaf, moreover they were untouchables. Caste system in the Hindu community was extremely rigid. A person's birth was the determinate of his/her caste. In spite of good activities or contributions to the society a person by no means could change his/her caste position in the whole life. Even today low caste people in some parts of India are treated like prohibited creature even whose shadow was considered unholy for the upper caste people. Eventually a person because of his caste has to bear in himself the heavy load of humiliation and disregard imposed by the society. A person's activities could testify him/her as great but only for the caste barrier he/she could never be allowed to sit along with the other members of the higher castes. The stricture of un-holiness on the members of lower caste in no way could be erased. Lower caste population still has been barred from using the common cremation ground or common sources of water .

Even this culture of untouchability affected the Muslims in India to a great extent. At one stage of Muslim rule in India a fanciful emergence of caste system like that of Hindus among the Muslims became apparent. Though it was not so rigid like that of the Hindu society but like that of Hindu caste divisions Muslims also became divided in four main social groups i.e. 1) Ashraf 2) Atraf 3) Azraf and 4) Azlaf (Karim, Dr,A.K.N p :32)

“A person having mainly a foreign origin was treated like a Brahmin in Hindu stratification hieratically as Ashraf in the Muslim society as the topmost sect. Ataraf were the person, who originated form the local population and in the society they were positioned after the Asharaf. The third group was Azraf, who were like Boishhays of Hindu caste system and last class was Azlaf, who were sudras of Musalman socity.”(ibid) A person from Azlaf class did not have the permission to enter the mosque and, therefore, Azlaf adhered to the bottom level in so called caste hierarchy chain in the Muslim community. The lower class population in Muslim society was considered as slaves only to serve the upper class in the society. Like the Hindu lower caste, they did not have the minimum privilege in a normal human should get from the society. It was socially prohibited to associate with a person having an Azlaf background. Even they would not be allowed to enter the same mosque for prayer and they also would not be allowed to be buried in the same graveyard after death with the member of the upper caste.

Lalon protested against all social disparities that the institutional religions preach. His first revolt was against caste system. Lalon could realize that caste system was the main weapon of the upper-class population for exploiting mass population, to discriminate the poorer class of the society and to oppress the hapless people. This is why Lalon wanted to wipe out all social disparity manifested in caste system. He says,

If one cannot give away the caste identity

One cannot meet God

But what a vague boost of caste!

Lalon says, if I could catch hold of the caste within my hand

I unhesitatingly put it (caste) on fire.’

Lalon lived a long life of 116 years. During his long life span he fought against all religious discriminations, religious oppression, caste system and social disparity. Lalon was so conscious about the negative effect of existing religious practices that he himself never disclosed his religious identity to anybody and even after his death he did not want to be buried according to any religious ritual. Hitokori a local fortnightly magazine which was published by Meer Mosharraf Hossain in Kushtia, brought a precise essay on Lalon Fakir in its issue on 31<sup>st</sup> October in 1890 just after 14 days of Lalon’s death in which it was stated that ‘He did not want to be buried following the rituals of any religion or community. For that reason during his burial no Mollas (Muslim religious teacher) or Purohits (Hindu religious leader) no Gangajal (holy water of Ganges) were required to sanctify his dead body. But celebration of glorification of the name Hari was performed. Before his death he advised his disciples that he should be buried in his *Akhra*. No obsequies ceremony should be arranged but his disciples would arrange a get together of Bauls to mourn his death.’(Hossain A.I; p. 542). Sudhir Chakraborti says, ‘Is there any other movement comparable to Lalon’s protest against caste and religion? Getting born in such a prejudiced and religion ruled society Lalon ignored and proclaimed war against religion. It was not an easy task for a person born in a prejudiced 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. (Chakraborti; S, p.-29).

Lalon Shah came forward with a very liberal holistic approach. Lalon with a noble intention of unification among men with a bond of equity preached his philosophy. Lalon denied the utility of any other religious ideas except humanism, all the worships except worshipping man, all the Gods except human *Guru*. He believed in materialistic real world rather than the idealistic future. He strongly believed in the supremacy of man rather than any invisible God. Lalon says,

*Maanush tatta jaar sattya haay mone*

*Seki aanya tattya maane.*

*Matir dhibi kather chhabi*

*Bhut bhabisyat aar deba debi*

*Bholena na se ashab rupi*

*Je maanush raatan chene.*

### **Translation**

Does he bother for any other ism

Who is enlightened by human-ism?

Clay-made sculpture, wooden-framed pictures

Specter, witches, gods and deities

He bothers nothing

Who understand the human gem.

He did not believe in any so called god and goddess of the holy scriptures of different religions. In spite of Lalon's materialistic ideas in his preaching one can find the elements of mysticism. The reason is Lalon's movement was for the liberty of lower class population of the then Bengal who had no other means to relinquish their agonies to any one excepting an all powerful God and that is supposed to give some kind relief for them, gave them a passion for life. But Lalon could realize that manmade religion had no power to emancipate human from miseries rather these religions are the root cause of all sufferings. Thus he wanted to educate exploited mass about the meaninglessness of manmade religions. Rather Lalon wanted to enlighten people about the capacity of human being, who can overcome all his miseries only, if he himself could understand his own potential and thus Lalon stated that it is the human body that needs to be worshipped, nothing else. If someone can understand the essence of humanity one can emancipate himself from all miseries. For this reason Lalon's mysticism could be termed as mystic materialism. That is why Lalon says 'offer your worship to man instead of God' because man is the reality. Thus Lalon gave more importance on man than God, on human body to scripture and humanity to religion.

Laon Shah is generally known to us a mystic poet and philosopher. But all his mysticisms turned at last to be materialistic. He mystified his beliefs in God and said he is ready to believe in God

but if only there is evidence that God exists. What cannot be proved by evidence Lalon did not believe on that being. In one of his famous devotional song where he says

*Papi adham taraite Sain*

*Patit Paban nam sunte paai*

*Saatya mithya janbo hethai*

*Toraiter aj amai.*

### **Translation**

To rescue the sinner

You have got the name of savior

Only I will acknowledge you as savior

If I have been rescued.

It is notable that in this verse of Lalon, the existence of God and His virtue have been questioned. Lalon like other mystic philosopher did not accept the power of God as savior. He added condition 'if'. This 'if' is materialism. If Lalon is rescued then he will accept the power of God as savior otherwise God to Lalon, is a meaningless theme. We can make a comparison of Lalon with 19<sup>th</sup> century German Philosopher Feurbach who echoed the same idea with regard to God and proclaimed the concept God is nothing but the self-created image of human being himself. Like that of Lalon, Feurbach also had emphasized on humanity as a religion. We found astonishing similarities between these two philosophers of 19<sup>th</sup> century. But in spite of their materialist fervor in their philosophy, from Marxist view point both failed to realize that "It is not the consciousness of man that determines his social existence, rather his social existence determines his consciousness (Ritzer)". Man is the product of his own social set up as such humanity, love all these ideas just cannot steamed out in human mind spontaneously. The social set up needs to be changed.

Lalon not only rose against the idea of all powerful God but he raised voice against all Holy Scriptures as well. And it is a matter of puzzle that being a man of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, when religious extremism was very strong and various religious reformative movements had been in progress by different religious reformers, Lalon had the courage to state that all scriptures are man created, all the Gods and Goddesses and their worshipping are man-made. It is undoubtedly a very bold step against the social current, a fact, which even today we cannot think of. Lalon uttered it in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal.

*Ki kalam pathalen aamar saai dayamay*

*Ak aak deshe aak aak bhasha*

*Koy khoda pathay.*

*Aak juge pathay kalam*

*Anyajuge haay keno haram*

*Aamni dekhi bhinno tamam*

*Bhinno dekha jaay.*

*Jaadi Aaki khodar haai rachana*

*Taateto bhinno thakena*

*Maanusher sakal rachana*

*Taaite bhinno haay.*

*Aak aak deshe aakek bani*

*Pathan ki saai guno maani*

*Maanusher rachito maani*

*Lalon fakir kaay.*

### **Translation**

What message is sent

By my almighty lord?

In different countries and in different languages

But all are acknowledged as God's speech.

God sends the message in an era

But made it invalid for the next

How could it be justified???

When God is eternal and omnipresent?

Why should we all be discriminated

By creating different sects and creed in the world.

If all are sent by the same almighty God

Why should they differ

All those are man composed

That's why, it differs from land to land



And from language to language.

When the Almighty is universal

Does he need to choose different messages

For different communities?

That is why Lalon considers all are man-written.

What a daring proclamation against Holy scriptures and religions! Lalon said that the Quran and Vedas all those were man-written not God-sent because all those failed to unify man in a common platform rather created differences among human beings.. What an audacity! The Hindu community considered their scripture as the speech of God Krishna and the Muslim believes that the Quran was incarnated upon Prophet Hazrat Mohammad during his twenty three years long prophetic career as the Allah's speech.

He not only criticized, religion, rituals, religious scripture he similarly did not spare the religion monger who used to oppress people in the name of religion. He strongly emphasized,

I see it's a world of darkness and blind

A man having in possession of lot of scriptures

Indulges himself in an unlawful manner

Like my blind mind.

Pundit is blind in egotism

Sadhu is in un-justification

Matabbar indulges in mischievous doing

Marking the boundary of land unjustly

With arrogating motive.

A blind evokes another

To ferry him on the other world

He himself does not know the path

But beckons others to follow him.

## 10.2 Anti Lalon Movement

Lalon successfully unveiled the real picture of the privileged groups, who, in the name of religion, exploit common people in various ways. The Brahmins, the Mollas all according to Lalon serve the purpose of the elite class. The wicked social leaders exploit the common people of the society in the name of religion. Lalon raised his voice against them through his lyrics. This resulted in a countrywide unified resistance of the upper class against Lalon and his disciples such as like *Lalon Hatao Andolon* which was launched from Rangpur under the leadership of Maulana Reyaz Uddin Ahmed.

Muslim leaders like Munshi Meherullah, Haji Shariatullah, Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Dudu Mia and poet Jonab Ali also were against Lalon and raised voice against him and his preaching and teaching. Movement against Lalon was not only confined in verbal protests, also there were attempts by the religious bigots, fundamentalist to harass Lalon and his followers in various places of the then Bengal. Moulovi Abdul Wali, Meer Mosharraf Hossain and poet Jonab Ali through their writings tried to create public opinions against Lalon and his teachings. Different books, leaflets were written in support of those movements. Among these *Jalalatul Fakra*, *Baul Dhangso Fatua* are mentionable. This we can view as a kind of class struggle. We know that Lalon Shah established his Akhra in Chheuriya a weaver majority area. Abul Ahsan Choudhury a renowned scholar on Lalon remarked in his book 'Lalon Shah' that, Lalon got all out supports and patronization from the local weaver community. By their donation and patronization he could establish his Akhra at Chheuriya. All the inhabitants of this village respected him very much. In fact, there is no doubt that the patronization and protection of the weavers paved the path of Lalon to establish himself as a great leader of the poorest segment of the society. (Choudhury. A. A;1992; p.15) Lalon as a leader of the weaver community tried to establish a new social order for his weaver disciples that helped them to lead their life on their own distinctive way based on Lalon's preaching which was different from traditional religious views and was more humane. This very teaching and preaching of Lalon attracted the common people of the society. As a consequence it turned into a tacit class struggle as an ultimate outcome.. Though Lalon and his followers had to face severe opposition but he and his disciples did not retreat from their mission. Lalon urged the people and their so-called leader to come in right terrace to preserve humanity giving all men their due share. Nothing could stop Lalon's voice for the common people. A large section of the mass population mainly from the poorer segment of

rural Bengal was gradually becoming conscious by the preaching of Lalon about their own rights, about their self, values and so on. As a result a holistic positive change in the life pattern of the exploited mass ushered in. that helped them to lead a life with dignity and honor. The idea of peaceful co-existence of people from different color creed and religion in the society is basically an offshoot of Lalon and similar ideas that existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. The present chaos and all sorts of extremism that we have been facing in today's world could only be overcome by falling back to the ideas that Lalon and similar preacher who preached for the freedom of mass people. Lalon's preaching was to a great extent could bring a sort of renaissance among the folk people of Bengal.

In his outlook, attitude and life pattern, Lalon Shah was thoroughly a secular person, as well as an ardent preacher of secularism in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. He had a stubborn stance against dogmatism, religious bigotry and fundamentalism. In his long lifetime he struggled for a harmonious, equitable and indiscriminate society.

The *Hitokori*' left some interesting hints about Lalon's religious belief as well. *Hitokori* disclosed that Lalon himself did not follow any institutional religion, but the followers of all religions considered him as the member of their own caste. He was so much closely affiliated to Muslim community that people used to think him as a member of Muslim community. Followers of Hindu religion mistook him as the follower of *Vaisnavism* because of his free mixing with the followers of Vaisnava sect. He did not support caste system. It is not surprising to misunderstand him as the believer in Param Brahma for his belief in formless god. But in actual he was none of the above. He practiced 'Guruism' a cult concept that existed in Indian subcontinent from remote past particularly among the subaltern population of the land. It is noteworthy, to state that for his disciples nothing was more important than that of worshipping Lalon as their 'Guru'. They always recite '*Sai*' as their verbal holy speech. (Choudhury. SA. A. 2009; p.704). Lalon Shah's struggle was against religious bigotry and fundamentalism not against the follower of the religion. He wanted to unify all men in a bond indiscriminately negating caste, race and religious identity and this was one of the remarkable point of Lalon's movement. During Lalon's life time in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, Kolkata based movements of the newly emerged urban wealthy class like Brahma Samaj Movement, Bidhaba Bibaha Movement and so on were initiated to liberalize their own religious rigidity for their own class interest, Lalon Shah on the contrary looked for the emancipation of the exploited mass population of rural Bengal "who had nothing to loose except

their Chains (Marx)”. His revolutionary preaching tried to bring a renaissance among rural prejudiced people to be united in a bond by forgetting their religious, racial and caste identity at a time when religion was the most important influential phenomenon of the society. Lalon was the only person who dared to stand against all existing traditional social religions when no other contemporary so called social reformer dared to think of.

Lalon Shah could be termed as the path finder of the subaltern population of rural Bengal. He passed his life under British colonial rule. The rural areas of Bengal were basically ruled by the British created Zaminder class having ownership of land, a system which was previously unknown in the country. The newly created Zaminder class destroyed the old economic system of rural Bengal and introduced new revenue system which was against the interest of the *Rayots*; the poorer peasant section of the population. To extract revenue from the land these newly created Zaminders used to apply all sorts of pressure and persecution on the peasants. Their cruelty against their *Rayots* and peasants was inhuman. Our history carries its relics. Kumarkhali the working place of Lalon, a part of Kushtia district was under Tagore Zamindari and the picture of the poor peasant and *Rayots* was same. Lalon Shah as their leader, many a times lead these poor peasants against the atrocities of Tagore Zamindari. Mention can be made of an incident where Lalon Shah along with his disciples took part in an encounter to protect Kangal Harinath (1833-1896) one of Lalon’s friends whose life was of under threat from the Tagore Zaminder. Harinath was the publisher of a magazine named “*Gram Barta Prokashika*” in which he wrote a series of articles on the persecution of Zaminder over their subject. This raised the anger of the Zaminder and as a consequence Harinath’s life became endangered. Zaminder sent his musclemen to bring him to task so that Harinath gets a lesson for his so called activities against the zaminder. At this critical situation Lalon to rescue Harinath from the wrath of the Zaminders played an extremely bold role by physically taking part in the mission. Lalon stood for Harinath with his one thousand followers who came forward with sticks in their hand to protect his friend’s life.( Choudhury. A. A. 2012; p.18-19.).

We present herewith the quotation from the book titled “*Songs of Lalon*” by Samir Das Gupta. He wrote, “Ironically, among the many incidents that are known to have provoked Lalon to take up the bludgeon against perpetrators of injustice, as they existed in the shape of agents of the state (zaminder) and the intolerant religious zealots of the caste-ridden Brahmanical order, was one which Lalon and his disciples had to stand up against the atrocities unleashed on Kangal

Harinath by clubmen in the employ of local Tagore zamindars during Debendranath's tenure. It is also known that Harinath had published a series of articles in the *Grambarta Prakashika* accusing the Tagore zamindars, which forced the British high officials of the state to investigate the matter. After that incident, Lalon was looked upon by the common people not only as their spiritual mentor but also as a friend of the down-trodden peasants. Harinath's 2000-page (unpublished) diary contains detailed accounts of the "tyrannical acts committed by Debendranath and his educated sons.(Gupta; S. D. p. 20).

### 10.3 Lalon's Contribution to Women Liberty

Another most important side of Lalon's social movement is his endeavor for women's liberty. As Engels stated with the emergence of state, private property and family in human society women became the slave of all powerful patriarch in the society and were treated as a commodity of male. Since then, society, religion everything always degraded woman as inferior to man. All the major religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism subjugated and chained women with the shackle of religious rules. Islam which gives women the most privileges also captivated women within the four walls and make them compelled to think to be inferior to male. Though it is claimed that Islam gives equal rights to women but in the Quran the authority of man over woman has been established (The Holy Qur'an ;Translated in English by Abdullah Yusuf Ali); page-87). In Hindu religion women are nothing but a refugee and are treated in a spiteful way as a path to hell. In Mahabharat women are condemned as sinful object and regarded as strength less, wisdom less creatures and a liar.( Singh. K. 2009; p. 16). Buddhism also did not give equal position and status to woman in respect of dignity and honor. 'According to Buddhist traditions Buddha taught his followers to look on with great suspicion and to put no trust in women; and his preaching encouraged all married men to abandon their wives and children for the religious life, in order to become monks. (ibid;p.127.).

In 19th century Bengal, women were merely treated as the consumers' commodity and women had no minimum social right in the family and society. William Award writes that "...the position of women is indescribable. They have no education, there is no school for them, even they do not know stitching and knitting. They have to wear a piece of cloth only.----They are busy with kitchen only. Meaningfully women were prisoner. They do not have permission to talk with other members without female. Without close relative they would not look at any other

male person. She would be treated as a maid slave in her own family. Even she does not have permission to eat a meal sitting with her husband". (ibid). We know the Satee was a stigma of the social history of Bengal. With the initiatives of Raja Ram Mohan Roy it was prohibited by enactment of law but the misery of a widow did not lessen. A widow had to lead an unspeakable painful life which is not less painful than death. "Although it be the duty of a widow to be burnt with her husband. She has the alternative either to live after his death as a Brahmachari or to die on her own in the flames. Should she resolve to live; she must pass her life in charity, piety and mortification. She must eat but one meal a day and never sleep upon a bed, under pain of causing her husband to fall from a state of bliss. She must abstain from ornamenting her, or eating out of magnificent vessels or of delicious food and she must daily offer oblation for the Manes of ancestors.<sup>1</sup> This widow life was so hard and painful that in some cases it encouraged some widows to be sati". (Basu. S. 2014;p.232). A widow life was like a life of a living dead. "As a widow she is doomed to all sorts of indignity, the name of widow being a reproach. All her fine clothing is taken away from her, she is stripped off ornaments which she can never wear: Her beautiful hair is shaved off and she then becomes a slave in the house where she formerly was the mistress. This deplorable condition of a widow sometimes compelled her to become a satee (ibid;p.232).

The then Muslim society was not so prejudiced like that of its contemporary Hindu society, but the position of the woman in the Muslim society was also not all favorable or congenial for the women. Like Hindu women they also were socially imprisoned within the four walls and for the *Parda System*, they were hardly permitted to go for education, or to go to public places, to meet other male members except own brother and father. Polygamy in Muslim society degraded Muslim women in such way that in some cases they were treated as slaves. Religion mongers and teachers always humiliated Muslim women by imposing different religious Fatwas. How vulnerable the Muslim women were in the society could be viewed from a lot of descriptions recorded in our literature and social history. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat a pioneer feminist female writer of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali literature brought details in the position of the women in her contemporary Bengal in the book entitled 'Oborodh Basini.' In this book she portrayed the vulnerability of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. She started in her book that 'A house was on fire. The housewife wisely putting all her ornaments in a hand box came out of the room with a hurry. But she noticed that some men were busy putting out the fire just outside of the room. By

noticing the male persons outside the room she came back into the room and sat on its floor under the cot. The wretched woman was burnt but she did not come out in front of the males to save her. What a self-captivity of women? (Rokaya Rachnabali; 2015; p.389). This is not all. 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali literature reveals that due to Parda sick women were not allowed to take treatment from male doctors even if she is in her death bed. Ironically this scenario is equally applicable for the Hindu women also. We herein, can make citation of a report of Morning Chronicle published on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1855. The report was on a wretched Hindu widow who was not allowed to go to hospital for treatment. It states that “Thursday last an old widow fell from the top of a house. Being a woman and a widow, she was not permitted to be taken to Medical Hospital”. What a shameful prejudice! Death was preferable than violating the custom!! (ibid). This was very common scenario of 19<sup>th</sup> century prejudiced society towards women. At the time when this was the attitude of the society towards women, it was Lalou who through his *Sadhana* and practice glorified women with full dignity.

We have to acknowledge that in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Kolkata, some urban based social movements were initiated and in some cases upper class women were the beneficiaries but ironically those movements could not change the fate of hapless women in the rural Bengal. Some initiatives taken by the government and the scholars started to open the threshold of the women's liberty. Through the initiatives taken by some progressive women of 19<sup>th</sup> century especially Swarnakumari Devi, Kamini Roy, Prosannomoyi Devi, Mokkodayini Mukhopadhyay, Rajkumari Bandopadhyay, Kadmbini Bandhopadhyay, Jamini Sen, Girizakumari Bandopadhyay, Jogammohini Sen, Brahmomoyi Das, Kundumala Devi, Girindomohini Das and Begum Rokeya Sakayat are notable herewith, who through their writings, works and establishing The Bengal Ladies Association contributed for the up gradation of the position of women in the society which propelled the favorable wind for the liberty of women. It was stated in a critique published in *Brahmo Public Opinion* on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1880 where it is stated that, ‘We beg to acknowledge with thanks that the book which has been published under the auspicious of *Bango Nari Samaj* or Bengal Ladies’ Association. What delights us more is the fact that all essays are productions of some of the ladies of that association, mostly from the pen of Miss Radharani Lahiri. Some of the pieces are original and some are based on English works. The work reflects the highest credit on the ladies. The Bengal Ladies’ Association has given the best evidence of their intellectual, moral and spiritual culture’.(Basu. S.;edited;2013; vol-2; p. 323). But this attempt was criticized

by the contemporary scholars who termed it as a n attempt of the Bengali women to become English mem sahib. It was stated in Englishman in its issue published on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1887 that, ‘The convocation of Calcutta University was held on Saturday last. There was one thing to make us feel happy; the Bengal editors were invited this time. We were also present, but we could not feel happy and many may be astonished at this. The first reason of our regret was what we saw the degeneration of Bengali ladies of respectable families. How our society has been degrading under the influence of English education could be seen in Senate Hall on that day. Under the influence of English education, the Bengali ladies, at the cost of their modesty, attempted to become English *mem shahibs*. This scenario did not please us, rather brought tears in our eyes. To others, this may appear encouraging because it is ruinous to Hindus, may appear better, and they call these Anglicized ladies as Hindu ladies. They may also feel pleased at their advancement and independent move; but we are not prepared to consider them either as ‘Educated’ or as ‘Hindus.’(ibid). The Bengal Ladies Association and the initiatives of its member were not meant only for upper class urban women. It did not had any program for upgrading the status for the hapless rural woman folks who were mostly the pray of social prejudices and persecution. When rural women were suffering from limitless agonies, there was nobody to look after their betterment or for the welfare of the rural women. At that time it was Fakir Lalon Shah in rural Bengal through his preaching stretched an ample horizon for women’s liberty. Lalon Fakir came forward with a unique voice for the liberty of women through his preaching and practice. It is Baulism where women are treated as savior of mankind. According to Baulism no *Sadhak* can attain *Siddhi* without the help of women. As we know that the mystic *Sadhana* of Baulism is body centric *Sadhana*. And the success of this body centric mystic *Sadhana* needs the active participation of women. In Baul term woman is termed as *Chetan Guru* who only who alone can help the *Sadhak* to be successful in his *Sadhana*. Lalon in one of his song regarded woman as *Achin Manush* which is the symbol of very glorified being.

আছে দিন দুনিয়ার অচিন মানুষ এক জনা

কাজের সময় পরশমণি আর অসময় তারে চেন না ।।

নবী আলী এই দুই জনে

কলমাদাতা কুল আরফিনে

বেকলেমায় সে অচিনজনে

পীরের পর হয় জান না ।।



যে দিনে সাঁই নৈরাকারে  
ভেসেছিলেন একেশ্বরে  
সেই অচিন মানুষ এসে তারে  
দোসর হলো তৎক্ষণা ।।  
কেউ তারে জেনেছে দড়  
খোদার ছোড় নবীর বড়  
লালন বলে নড়চড়  
সে বিনে কুল পাবা না ।।

### **Translation**

There is an unknown being in this world  
In the time of need she is the philosopher's stone  
But at the end of need you forget her.

The Prophet and Ali  
Preached sermon for the whole world  
She is the spiritual guide of the saints  
Without any sermon.

When God was floating  
On the water all alone  
She gave accompanied Him  
At that time of needs.

Somebody believe it strongly that  
She is inferior to God but superior to the Prophet  
Lalon says whatever you do  
Without her mercy you will not get salvation.

In the above song Lalon signifies woman as the guide of Prophet Muhammad and his disciple Hazrat Ali the Caliph the preachers of God's sermon for the whole world When no religion showed any respect to women as a human being, it was Lalon and his Baul cult dignified woman as the spiritual guide of the Prophet. History reveals that no women were assigned to become a prophet by the Supreme being. But in Baulism a woman can become a Guru and have her own disciples. In this particular song it is said that woman is under God but superior to the Prophet

and it has undoubtedly been said that without her mercy no one can get salvation. It is true in the case of Baul Shadhana. In the Shadhana if the Shadhika is not kind upon the Shadhak that Shadhak cannot be successful in his Shadhana. For this reason, Lalon in his many songs give more importance and in some cases considered woman as more significant than that of man. Even in some songs Lalon dignified woman as the collaborator of God in the creation of this universe. In many instances, Lalon and Baul community in their cultic philosophy expressed woman as the metaphor of God. In Baul terms the word Haa is synonym to *Chironjib* meaning eternal, and by this word they indicate the ultimate Supreme Being. Baul Shadhana is a preaching of one in duality. In Baul Shadhana both Baul Shadhak and Shadhika equally show respects and devotion to each other. None is considered as superior or inferior. Both are equal. Most part of the Baul Sadhana is women body centric. The *Mahajoga* or the final moment in Baul Sadhana comes within first three days of menstrual period of a woman. We have already discussed it in chapter four.

The creation theory of Baul philosophy reveals the secret of the creation of universe as well as the creation of life. According to Baul belief, in creation of the universe and life, woman played the major role. Baul philosophers by adopting the *Purush-Prokiti Tatta* of Sangkhya Darshan interpreted their theory of creation. It is *Prokriti* according to this theory makes the *Purush* or Supreme Being fertile and finally the process of creation started. Before the creation of this universe God was in formless state, then according to Baul belief it was Fatima who conceived the formless God in her womb and finally gave the Brahma a definite shape. Lalon states that,

যখন ছিল বিন্দুমণি  
ধরেছিল মা জননী  
ডিমে উসুম দিল শুনি  
ধরে ব্রহ্মার আকার ।।

Translation

When He was formless semen  
Mother conceived it into her womb  
And finally Brahma gets His shape.

Here, in this above verse it is stated that without the mercy of mother, Brahma had no existence. That even Brahma did not have the capacity to accomplish the creation of the universe without the direct assistance of female being. In Baul philosophy the process of creation theory is

described through the process of the creation of his human being. Lalon Fakir says that everything was in the state of confusion in the very beginning stage of the creation, and it was female being was the principal cause for the completion of the creation of the universe. He says,

অন্ধকারে আগে ছিলেন সাঁই রাগে

আলকারেতে ছিল আলের উপর

ঝরেছিল একবিন্দু হইল গভীর সিন্ধু

ভাসিল দীনবন্ধু নয় লাখ বছর ।।

অন্ধকার ধন্ধকার নিরাকার কুণ্ডকার

তারপরে হল হুহুংকার

হুহুংকারে শব্দ হল,ফেনারূপ হইয়া গেল

নীর গভীরে সাঁই ভাসলেন নিরন্তর ।।

হুহুংকারে ঝংকার মেরে দীপ্তকার তার পরে

ধন্ধ দোরে ছিলেন পরওয়ার;

ছিলেন সাঁই রাগের পরে , সুরাগে আশ্রয় করে

তখন কুদরতিতে করিল নিহার ।।

যখন কুণ্ডকারে কুণ্ড ঝরে বাম অঙ্গ ঘর্ষণ করে

তাইতে হইল মেঘের আকার;

মেঘের রক্ত বিচে শক্ত হল , ডিম্ব তুলে কোলে নিল

ফকির লালন বলে নিলা চমৎকার ।।

### **Translation**

Before the Dark age the God was in the state of Love

He was in form of Al in Alkar

Then a drop of Noor (light) dispatched

And from that Noor a deep ocean was created

The God floated Himself there for nine lacs years for the next motion.

After dark state, there are illusion state,

water state and foggy state

A Big Bang took place to the creation

For that Big Bang a horrible sound occurred

And the spume was the result.

The God then took His seat on the Water.

With the crumbling after the Big Bang

A luminous state commenced

In that definite state the God was insane mood of devotion

That resulted into an unimpeachable aspiration for the beloved

Then He took shelter in a supernatural form.

When the fog was poured down

He got abrasion in His left side

He got solid shape with the menstruation of woman

And He took up the Egg in His arms

Fakir Lalon says,

It's an amazing game of God.

This is why Lalon says mother is the core of the creation and the identity of the father of the

universe lies behind the mother's identity. This is a clear proclamation of highness of women and

at the same time it was daring venture of Lalon to put the position of woman above God. Lalon

says,

আছে মায়ের ওতে জগৎপিতা

ভেবে দেখ না

হেলা কর না বেলা মের না ।।

কোরানে সাঁই এশরা দেয়

আলিম যেমন লামে লুকায়

আকারে সা-কার বাপা রয়

সামান্যে কি জানা যায় ।।

নিষ্কামী নির্বিকার হয়ে

দাঁড়াও মায়ের স্মরণ লয়ে

বর্তমানে দেখ চেয়ে

স্বরূপে রূপ নিশানা ।।

কেমন পিতা কেমন মা সে

চিরকাল সাগরে ভাসে

লালন বলে কর দিশে

আছে ঘরের মধ্যে ঘরখানা ।।

## **Translation**

Father lies under the shadow of mother (woman)

O my mind! ponder on it deeply

Please do not waste your time ignoring this mystery.

There is the hint about it in the Quran

The imageless God mixes with the image

Like the 'Alif' hides in 'Laam'

It's really a great mystery.

Proceed to the mother (woman) if you want

Carefully with libidoless innocent love

Inspect the invisible God in your own image.

Father and Mother always float in the ocean

What is the meaning of it!

Lalon says, inquire of yourself

There is the house into the house.

In the above verse it is clearly stated that mother, that means the woman is the primordial power of the universe. Through her the universe came into existence. Therefore it is none but the woman should be worshipped. Woman is the real Guru or prophet. Lalon Fakir in another songs says,

ভজরে জেনে শুনে

নবী কলেমা করলেন দান

আলী হন দাতা, ফতেমা দাতা কি ধন গুণে

নিলে ফতেমার স্মরণ, ফতে হয় করণ

ফরমান আছে সাইয়ের জবানে ।।

## **Translation**

Vest your worship right one

The Prophet disseminate the sermon

Ali was his collaborator, but why Fatema is so important

If anybody take shelter of Fatema

He/she gets the salvation

It is stated in the sermons.

In this verse, Fatema is depicted as the symbol of woman. Neither, the Prophet or Ali was considered as the savior but Fatema, and why? Because Fatema as the symbol of mother nourished and cherished the creation as well as the God. This is why Lalon says,

মায়েরে ভজিলে হয় তার বাপের ঠিকানা

### **Translation**

Only through worshiping mother

You can get the identity of father

Fakir Lalon Shah through his preaching and teaching as well in his practice of life set an illustrious iconic example of crusader for the liberty of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

### **10.4 Lalon and Rural Renaissance in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal**

Encyclopedia Britannica states Renaissance; which means rebirth, is the period in European civilization that immediately followed the Middle Age. Renaissance period is characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship and values. Scholars and thinkers consider Renaissance as the period of revival of Classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation. (Encyclopedia Britannica 2017).

After the conquest of Bengal by the British Imperial power, changes in the sphere of economy, society and culture started taking place in the country. It was a time when Bengal witnessed sudden but definite revival of art, literature, and learning that begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued till the end of the era and marked the transition from the medieval to the modern world. These enormous changes brought about by the advent of British rule are termed by some scholar as Bengal renaissance. It is named as Bengal Renaissance because the movement was initiated in the Kolkata city of Bengal province. Eminent scholars like Shibnath Shasree, Ramesh Chandra Mojumder, Amit Sen, Binay Ghose, Jogesh Chandra Bagole, Arbindo Ghose, Mohitlal Mojumder, Sunilkumar Gupta, Andasankar Roy, Atulchandra Gupta, Kazi Abdul Wadud, Kalikingkar Dutta, H.C.E Jakeria, Amlesh Tripathi and Narhari Kabiraj, Jadunath Sarkar positively believe that, ‘It was truly a renaissance, wider, deeper and more revolutionary than that of Europe...’(Hossain. A. I. 2017; p.23). N.S. Bose states that, ‘Modern India evolved out of the awakening of 19th century is a historic truth and it was Bengal which was the center of this awakening. (ibid). The above views of a section of scholars on Indian History could be termed as partial truth but not the whole truth and these views have been challenged. The reason is, the

changes that occurred in Bengal were centered on Kolkata and initiated by British backed English educated class. Members of this newly educated emerging bourgeoisie were product of British imperialism. These educated gentry were created by the British Imperialist power to serve their colonial interest. The basic aim of the movements that were initiated by this class was to protect their caste Hindu interest in the face of Christian aggression. Raja Ram Mohan Roy is considered as the pioneer of so called Bengal Renaissance and is known as the path finder of India. He wanted to reintroduce Vedantic Hinduism to combat Christianity. However, undoubtedly British rule, created a reawakening among the newly emerged British backed Hindu English educated middle class, but their efforts remained centered around Kolkata and their aim was to protect the interests of the caste Hindus only. They could not create any universal appeal of their efforts to change the traditional exploitative inhuman scenario of caste system; rather they favored the bigotry in the disguise of progressive ideas. On the other side, the so called Bengal Renaissance had no role to solve the problems of large Muslim population of Bengal who were mostly poor *Rayots* of Hindu Zamindars. Impact of this renaissance also did not create any impact on the life and living of the poor peasants in rural Bengal at the time when Kolkata was humming up with different reform movements. In the same period in rural Bengal was witnessing some spontaneous surfacing of movements in the mental spheres of the exploited mass population under the leadership of different sages. We have already discussed about these movements in Chapter 5, 6, 7, and 8. The most prominent of these movements was Baul movement. Fakir Lalon shah a sage of 19<sup>th</sup> century lead the Baul movement during colonial administration in Bengal and under his charismatic leadership Baulism reached its zenith.

Lalon's Baul movement had much wider impact in terms of humanitarian appeal and played important role in upholding the dignity of economically deprived, socially oppressed class of the rural society as compared to that of endeavor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kolkata based so called Renaissance movement. Lalon throughout his life, worked for the awakening of slumbered, unconscious, indigent village-folks who had been treated as sub-human beings by the privileged elites of the society from time immemorial. His lyrics were addressed to raise the consciousness of mass population so that they themselves could realize about the reasons for their deprivations and subhuman condition. The unconscious, prejudiced subaltern population of rural Bengal found a sigh of relief in Lalon's preaching and en masse started embracing Baul faith as their destiny. Lalon's powerful, unique voice echoed the highness and dignity of man. He preached

equality among men irrespective of religion caste, color, creed or race. Lalon affirmed ‘God did not make any discrimination among men but the society has created all discrimination, injustice, disparity and inequality among us’. Lalon through his lyrics stated ‘...it is not God rather the society has imposed on men by creating different discriminatory sects such as the Brahmin, the Chandal, the Fakir and the Muchi (cobbler)’. Lalon says,

*Jaat gelo jaat gelo bole*

*Aaki ajab karkhana*

*Satya pathe keu naay raji*

*Sab dekhi tanana.*

*Jakhan tumi bhobe aale*

*Takhan tumi ki jaat chhile*

*Ki jaat hoba jabar kaale*

*Sekotha bheba bolona.*

*Brahmian, Chandal, Fakir, Muchi*

*Aak jalei saab haigo suchi*

*Dekhe shune haaina ruchi*

*Jaameto kauke thubena.*

*Gopone je beshyar bhat khai*

*Taate ki dharmer khaati haai*

*Lalon bole jaat kaare koi*

*Aa bhramoto gelona.*

### **Translation**

Everybody dreads losing his caste

Absurd as it sounds to me.

Who, I ask is ready to walk in the path of truth?

Hesitation

When you came to this world

Tell me what was your caste-mark?

And at what caste will you be

At death's door?



Brahmin, Chandal, Chamar, Muchi  
All cleanse their body  
With the same water  
Yet I hear people talk of high and low  
I find it tasteless; for Yama knows no difference.  
How is religion desecrated  
When one shares meals with a whore in secret?

Says Lalon

The more I search for meaning of caste and creed,  
The less I can see through the maze!

One of the principal characteristics of the renaissance is humanism. Lalon in his verse echoed the highness of human being by rejecting the caste system which was the dominating social factor in 19th century Bengal. This is why, Lalon says all human being whether Brahmin, Chaldal, Fakir or cobbler (classified by society not by the God) are equal to almighty God. A Brahmin who is regarded as a very noble person in the society and Chandal the most humble member; both were created from the same source. Both drink, bathe and become sanctified with the water from the same source. God did not create holy water for the Brahmin to drink and the dirty water for the Chandal. God did not create a special sun, moon for providing light to the Brahmin only and not for the lower caste people. Fakir.Lalon, therefore, questioned if God does not make any difference among men than why should men create the differentiation.

Lalon Shah was a highly enlightened person. He tried to ignite the inner strength of the down trodden people of colonial prejudiced rural society of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Lalon raised his voice against all bigotry in a period when man to man discrimination was very common phenomenon and was considered as the lawful and inevitable component of the society, a holy matter of religion. It was not an easy task for Lalon to enlighten this illiterate, prejudiced, population. Lalon rendered all sorts of help to the needy people of the society. He preached his doctrine for the sake of betterment of the hapless, indigent, destitute people of the society. He felt the agonies, misery, and haplessness of the proletariat group as his own; thus, in course of time Lalon became the leader of the poorest hapless people of rural Bengal.

The most important characteristic of renaissance is humanism and logical expression of thought. Lalon preached both these among the people. He was the greatest humanist of his time and also

at the same time had a logical bend of mind. He tried to logically explain human miseries and discriminatory system deterring the path towards establishing human dignity. The destitute people influenced by the preaching of Lalon, learnt how to fight against all odds of life (Thesis). But it was a herculean task. Reactionary forces opposed Lalon and his preaching vehemently. In some instances his endeavor lead to conflict between the upper stratum population and the down trodden people (Anti thesis) and finally Baulism under the influence of Lalon's teaching emerged as a syncretic cult religion of the exploited mass of rural Bengal (Synthesis). Lalon's preaching even today has been enlightening the people about the real meaning of humanism, about the immense possibilities of human mind. Under his undisputed leadership the unconscious people of the society became united and were able to establish their rights. The members from the lower caste of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities under his charismatic leadership ventured to claim their rightful place with dignity in society which was beyond their thinking. . This subaltern population became energized to fight against any kinds of autocratic attempt for subsiding their rightful demands. One example of such was the fight against the powerful Zaminder of Shilaidaha; Debendranath Tagore. The zamindar sent his muscleman against Kungal Harinath, a bosom friend of Lalon Shah for publishing series of stories of torture and illegal steps of the Zaminder against his indigent subjects in Harinath's fortnightly magazine *Grambarta Pokashani*. Lalon Shah came forward with his hundreds of disciples to protect Kungal from the wrath of Zaminder. (Hossain. A. I. 2016. p.43). The poor people of the society were motivated by the charismatic personality of Lalon so much that they became united in such a degree and successfully faced all attacks from the elites of the society.

Lalon Shah was successful raising sense of self-dignity and the sense of class-for-itself among the unconscious members of the society, who were subject to limitless torment. Destitute people of the society found the real meaning of their life in the preaching of Lalon and as a consequence they by detaching themselves from the so-called society, initiated their own way of thinking about their destiny and created the path of salvation by their own efforts. In this mission Lalon's omnipotent doctrine which was preached in the form of a song was the guiding principle and slogan. (ibid. p.230). The fact remains, however, that Lalon's songs could successfully influence vast segments of Bengal life, long before Tagore. (ibid). Lalon's preaching made common people class conscious and as self-consciousness. His holistic approach helped in creating positive changes among the life of the common people. Lalon's endeavor for creating a society

of co-existence of people from all stratum of life was in fact a revolutionary thinking and could be termed as a major attempt to break the class barrier in the society. But ironically Lalon failed to understand as mentioned earlier that man's consciousness depend on his material existence. Unless his material base is changed a man cannot change himself or the society, unless the material base is changed. Nevertheless, Lalon's attempt to bring renaissance in dark village life in Bangladesh was no doubt an epoch-making event. He sheltered the destitute people of the society. Most of his disciples were from schedule and lower caste who found the real meaning of life and the holistic message of salvation in Lalonism. He fought for them for their social recognition and dignity, for the rebate of tax from Zaminder. In this point of view Lalon could be regarded undoubtedly as the father of rural renaissance.

### 10.5 Sociological interpretation of Lalon's Songs

The main weapon of Lalon movement was his lyrical verses. Among hundreds of his lyrics many contains sociological meaning. I have sorted 32 such verses presented below, composed by Lalon Shah that carries sociological importance in their inner meanings.

পাপ পুণ্যের কথা আমি কারে বা শুধাই

এক দেশে যা পাপ গণ্য

অন্য দেশে পুণ্য তাই ।।

তিব্বত নিয়ম অনুসারে

এক নারি বহু পতি ধরে

এদেশেতে হলে পরে

ব্যভিচারি দ- দেয় ।।

শুকোর গরু দুইটি পশু

খাইতে বলেছেন যিশু

তবে কেন মুসলিম হিন্দু

পিছেতে হটায় ।।

দেশ সমস্যা অনুসারে

ভিন্ন বিধান হতে পারে

সুস্মজ্ঞানে বিচার করলে

পাপ পুণ্যের বালাই নাই ।।

পাপ হলে ভবে আসি  
পুণ্য হলে স্বর্গবাসি  
লালন বলে নমি উবশী  
নিত্য নিত্য তার প্রমান পাই ।।

### **Translation**

“Oh, to whom I would ask about sin and piety  
Which vary from country to country  
In one country what is prohibited as sin  
Is accepted as piety in another one.

In Tibet, polyandry is accepted  
Which is treated as a great sin in Bengal  
And eventually here it is regarded as sin.”

In Christianity both beef and pork  
Are allowed to be eaten  
But in Hinduism beef and in Islam pork  
Are strictly prohibited.

Different norms may be accepted for geographical reasons  
But that might not be regarded as a religious issue  
Eventually we may conclude that sin and piety  
Are not religious issues but social phenomena.

According to theology for the sin we have come to the world for atonement  
And for the piety we get into heaven  
Lalon pays salute to Urbashi  
And that’s enough on logical ground.

Though this verse reflects apparently theological flavor, but it carries deep sociological significance. Sin and piety to Lalon is more sociological issues rather than that of religious. The concept of sin and piety differ in region to region and that is why, Lalon says what is strongly prohibited in one country, is accepted in another country. Therefore the notion of sin and piety or religion is more a social phenomenon rather than that of theological.

In second stanza it is stated that in Tibet a woman gets married with a number of male which is sociologically termed as polyandry. We know that in Tibetan Toda Tribe, when a woman gets married with a brother then she becomes wife of all other the brothers of her husband simultaneously. Lalou thus in the verse revealed how does a sociological issue is treated as religious ritual in Tibetan tribal cultural

In third stanza Lalou speaks about Taboos in different religions. He says that Christians and Hindus are allowed to eat pork but is prohibited among the Muslims. Again beef can be eaten by Christians and Muslims but prohibited for the Hindus.

In fourth stanza Lalou finally states that, hence religion, religious norms and values are social phenomenon that may vary country to country, land to land. If we ponder on it deeply only then we can understand that piety and sin are nothing but socially created norms.

It is surprising to notice that Lalou applied anthropological theory to describe the origin of religions and rituals in society. Like 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Feurbach he also proclaimed,

‘আল্লাহ হরি ভজন পূজন

সকলি মানুষের সৃজন

আচানক অচেনায় বচন

বাক ইন্দ্রিয় না সম্ভবে ।।

### **Translation**

All the Gods and prayers

Are nothing but man-created

Human imagination does not conceive

The image of an invisible phenomenon.

Lalou in his above lyric states that religion is a manmade phenomena that emerged in different forms in different societies based on the social surroundings. Religion is the outcome of our sensual experience. In anthropological theory we come to know that religion emerged from the fear of human mind, from their insecure situation before the nature. In the primitive society, when man lived together with others, they had to face different difficulties to survive. Primitive man lived in limitless insecurities and with unspeakable struggles against unfriendly nature. But to face these struggles, their immature mind did not have enough moral strength or they were not equipped with appropriate technology to face the unfriendly nature. They were weak and

helpless. As a consequence our ancestors started to worship any big fearful phenomenon to protect themselves from evil crafts. Thus the primitive religion was innovated out of fear in the primitive society. (Islam. M; 1992. p. 19). In ancient time man was the pray of nature. Paul Radin interprets the origin of religion in a way that ties it closely to a functional theory. He asks, “What is that originally led man to postulate to the supernatural?”(Yinger. J. M.;1957;p.54.). To answer the question, we must try to visualize the condition under which man lived at the dawn of civilization. With inadequate technological preparation, he was helpless before the powerful and capricious forces of the environment. (ibid). Their life, living, way of life depended on the wish of nature. The hapless primitive man was so helpless that they even offered their prayer to a big tree or stone to make it satisfied as if those things not do any harm to them- this practice is termed as Totemism. Primitive men when appeared before such an object which was unusual and unconceivable to their imagination, a spontaneous fear of an incomprehensive force grasped them and to save themselves they offered solemn prayer to that unusual object to make satisfied for not making any harm.(ibid). Thus in this way religion and worship were introduced in the society and Lalon aptly said that both religions and worship are innovation of humankind.

Lalon Shah is a notable religious reformer of Bengal. He was a man of humane quality, secular mind and an unorthodox personality. He conglomerated all the cults into humanistic religion. The main tenet of his preaching was to love humans. In his homily we find the message for freedom of human beings. To his cult, human being is the supreme gem, and only worshipping man one may get the touch of God. He says,

O my mind worship the indoctrinated man

You may get the touch of the untouchable being

In your life in this world.

Baulism as interpreted by Lalon Shah shook the caste based rural Bengal, especially prejudiced Bengali religion and ritualism. A positive trend of reformation especially to reform some rigid norms and rituals in all religions started to gain ground where the caste system became flexible and a liberal outlook gradually developed among the common people. In the Indian society, we may see afterwards that for changes in the social structure that occurred in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal to a great extent was a consequence of Lalon’s religious movement that liberalized the mind set of general population. Lalon, initiated a holistic change in the rural Bengal making its social fabrics flexible. In this flexible society one may change his position by dint of his activities which was a

far cry in the Indian prejudiced society. It may be mentioned that along with Lalon's endeavor some more reformation movements also played role in overpowering social dogmatism and a positive change started taking place augmenting the dignity of man which was the main objectives of Lalon's movement. We may refer to Professor Sree Nibash. He wrote in his book that a Sudra by occupation could change his social position and become a Brahmin and in this way, this reality was easily recognizable "When put on my shirt to go to the office, I leave my caste and again when I come back home and took off my shirt, I turn into my caste.( Kar. P. B. 1992; p.221).

Lalon, in his long life, fought for the dignity of man. He did not bother for anything but man. For this he preached a humanitarian religion which may term the "*Gurubadi Manab Darma*" the religion of man. The main message of this religion is to proclaim the philosophy of humanity by treating every man equally in respect of caste and social position because this human body is the abode of the Supreme Being. Therefore, only for the economic and social position the dignity of man should not be ignored. Thus, Lalon's religion became more humanitarian. For this reason he applauded to offer worship to man ignoring all gods and goddesses and deities. Avoiding all the cults and religions Lalon strongly declares,

Does he bother for anything

Who concentrates on human beings?

He boldly ignores all the goddesses and deities

Who worship the human guru.

Lalon Shah in his long life fought against social discrimination, social disparity and social injustice. He tried to awaken the slumbered ignorant people through his verses. He dreamt of a society, where there would not have the existence of any social discrimination, social injustice, caste disparity, social persecution, religious exploitation and every members of the society would enjoy their rights equally. He dreamt of an equitable society where communal harmony, secular outlook and liberal cults will prevail ensuring full dignity of its every member and no member the society would become prey of humiliation.

কি কালাম পাঠালেন আমার সাঁই দয়াময়

এক এক দেশে এক এক ভাষা

কয় খোদা পাঠায় ।।

এক যুগে পাঠায় কালাম

অন্য যুগে হয় কেন হারাম  
এমনি দেখি ভিন্ন তামাম  
ভিন্ন দেখা যায় । ।  
যদি একই খোদার হয় রচনা  
তাতে তো ভিন্ন থাকে না  
মানুষের সকল রচনা  
তাইতে ভিন্ন হয় । ।  
একেক দেশের এক এক বাণী  
পাঠান কি সাঁই গুণমনি  
মানুষের রচিত জানি  
লালন ফকির কয় । ।

### **Translation**

What message is sent  
By my almighty lord?  
There are different countries, different languages  
But acknowledged as God's speech.  
God sends the message in an age  
How could it be invalid in the next  
When God is eternal and omnipresent?  
By this way we all are discriminated  
In different sects on the world.  
If all sent by the almighty God  
Those should not differ  
All those are man composed  
Why, it differs from land to land  
And from language to language.  
Does Almighty choose to send  
Different messages for different communities  
But He is universal; His messages also should be universal  
Lalon Fakir claims all are man-written.



This is an unique verse which can demands sociological discussion. In this verse Lalon Fakir rejects all the possibilities that holy religious scriptures are revealed by the God. We know that on the earth for the different religions, different scriptures are sent by God. This scriptures are to be followed by the followers as guides in their life. It is believed that all these different scriptures had been revealed in different times for due to the necessity of the time. Lalon, therefore raises question in this context that Allah is believed as almighty, omnipotent and omnipresent. It is believed more that He knows everything of present, past and future and what is manifested or concealed. If it is true, according to Lalon, then why His revelation should be different for the difference of time. This is why Lalon from his logical stance says,

If all sent by the almighty God

Those should not differ

All those are man composed

Why, it differs from land to land

And from language to language.

Therefore, logically it means that these scriptures are actually not revealed by the same God and thus challenges the oneness of God. Lalon argues that if Allah was one in being then His revelation could not be different and since, it was different for the different time, therefore, all the scriptures are nothing but man written. Lalon finally asserts that

Does Almighty choose to send

Different messages for different communities

But He is universal; His messages also should be universal

Lalon Fakir claims all are man-written.

It was a real bold step of Lalon in a highly prejudiced 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal when everything was controlled by the religions and scriptures. During Lalon's time uttering such words against religion was un imaginable. But Lalon stood alone against religion bigotry and religious rites and condemned all the religious scripture declaring those as nothing but man-composed verses. Not only that Lalon in entire life never disclosed his religious identity. Being a member of a prejudiced society ignoring the social religious dogmas and scripture was not a matter of joke. But Lalon did it. Even when he prior to his death he instructed the disciples not to bury him or not to follow any religious rituals after his death. For this, in his life time Lalon had to face different countrywide movements against him such as Lalon Hatao Andolon (exile Lalon). It was

started from Rangpur under the leadership of Maulana Reyaz Uddin Ahmed. Munshi Meherullah, Haji Shariatullah, Titumir, Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, Dudu Mia and poet Jonab Ali collaborated him. The movements against Lalon did not remain confined in verbal protests. In some instances his followers were physically tortured. Anti Lalon movement had spread all over Bengal. Moulovi Abdul Wali, Mir Mosharraf Hossain and poet Jonab Ali all these persons started writing articles in the magazines and newspapers, books for raising mass supports against Lalon. The extent of hatred these writes spread against Lalon could be found in the book named 'Baul Dhangsha Fatua' edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury, published by Pathak Samabesh. For their anti-Lalon movement, Lalon and his followers had to face enormous social pressure but they did not retreat from their mission. But Lalon Shah sought logic behind the interpretation of fact avoiding all kinds of emotion and devotion. He says,

শুধাইলে খোদার কথা  
দেখায় সবাই আসমানে ।  
আছেন কোথায়- স্বর্গপুরে  
কেই নাহি তার ভেদ জানে । ।  
পৃথিবী গোলাকার শুনি  
অহর্নিশ ঘোরে আপনি  
তাইতে হয় দিবস-রজনী  
জ্ঞানী জনে তাহাই মানে । ।  
উর্ধ্ব দিকে নিশি হ'লে  
অধঃ দিকে দিবা বলে  
আকাশ তো দেখে সকলে  
উর্ধ্ব অধঃর মানুষগণে । ।  
আপন ঘরে কে কথা কয়  
না জেনে আকাশে দেখায়  
লালন বলে কেবা কোথায়  
বুঝে নাও তাই দিব্য জ্ঞানে । ।

### **Translation**

Why everybody points to the sky  
To mean the destination of God

Nobody knows His residence.

“The earth is round

And it orbits around

The reason why, day and night occur

All the wises are of opinions.

If day appears in one part of the globe

In the same time another part gets night

But all people of both sides of the globe

See the sky simultaneously.

Everybody looks forward to the sky for His destination

Not knowing who speaks in his own chamber

Nobody seeks for His real destination

Lalon says, ponder on it deeply.

In this particular verse Lalon keeps the sign of his scientific and materialistic thinking. Lalon, in the very initial stanza started his statement criticizing the believers who believe that God seats on an Arash-on the top layer of the sky where hell and heaven also are located. Lalon rejecting all those hypothetical belief said ‘how they (the believers) could certain about that the God seats on the top most layer of the sky when nobody has gone up into the sky and saw Him’?. Lalon says’ it is not for the any mystic power for whom day and night occurs, but the gravity of solar system and the shape of globe are responsible for the occurrence of day and night’. And, ‘since the globe is egg-shaped this is why, in when one side of the globe becomes dark, the other part sees day simultaneously. Lalon meaningfully says,

If day appears in one part of the globe

In the same time another part gets night

But all people of both sides of the globe

See the sky simultaneously.

Therefore, according to Lalon, it is not in the sky that God rests but if God seats anywhere that is inside the human being. The reason is as Lalon believed, that Gods, prayers and worships, rituals all these are manufactured by man as we have said earlier. This is why Lalon utters certainly

Everybody looks forward to the sky for His destination

Not knowing who speaks in his own chamber

Nobody seeks for His real destination

Lalon says, ponder on it deeply.

Though Lalon Shah is known as the mystic song composer but in some of his lyrics he sketched the irony of fact very lively which at last turns as the bold revolt against the social oppressors and administrations. Lalon raises his voice,

শহরে ষোল জন বোম্বটে

করিয়ে পাগল পারা নিল তারা সব লুটে ।।

রাজ্যেশ্বর রাজা যিনি

চোরের শিরোমণি

নালিশ করিব আমি

কোনখানে কার নিকটে ।।

পাঁচ জনা ধনী ছিল

তারা সব ফতুর হল

কারবারে ভঙ্গ দিল

কখন যেন যায় উঠে ।।

গেল ধন মালনামায়

খালি ঘর দেখি জমায়

লালন কয় খাজনাদারি দায়

কখন যেন যায় লাটে ।।

### **Translation**

Sixteen thieves of the body-town

Making the life hell snatched all belongings.

The king of the town is the principal thief

Whom do I complain?

For my compensation.

The five rich men

Become pauper

And quit their business

Now are counting down for final bankruptcy.

All our belongings go to godown

Now we are guarding the empty house

Lalon fears when this empty house

Will auction off for tax defaulter.

Fakir Lalon Shah was a sage of 19th century Bengal. He is especially known as the core Baul philosopher who by his Sadhana and lyrics laid the Baul Sadhana in a solid foundation.. This is why, lyrics and songs are nothing but the manifestation of devotional expression. In some instances' some of his songs are manifestation of body mystic *Sadhanas* that based on his social experience. This is why his utterances are the real portrayal of the contemporary society which bears the sociological significance. The above particular verse, starts with the body mystic philosophical statement but eventually it turns into the social description. 19th century Bengal was basically ruled by the Zaminders and usurers, administratively who were supposed to be responsible for looking after the betterment of the subject. But ironically they turned into persecutors who always were busy to oppressing the subject. This is why Lalon in despair uttered

The king of the town is the main thief

Whom do I complain?

For my compensation.

There is no hope, no way to get rid of this oppression. No subject can spare the persecution of Zaminder. Zaminders for their own gain repeatedly increased the taxes illegally. But nobody is to resist, because local administration was their collaborators. So, they had no way of getting compensation and this is why, the poorer class of the society fall in degradation for overtaxing imposed by the Zaminder. Lalon realistically sketched the picture uttering

All our belongings go to godown

Now we are guarding the empty house

Lalon fears when this empty house

Will auction off for tax defaulter.

It was the very common picture in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural Bengal. The peasant class even could not even lived hand to mouth, because lion's share of their production went to Zaminder's warehouse as the tax. Therefore Lalon's above utterance is more sociological rather than that of mystic.

কেমন ন্যায় বিচারক খোদা

বল গো আমায়

তাহা হ'লে ধনী-গরীব  
কেন এ ভুবনে রয় ।।

ভাল-মন্দ সমান হলে  
আমরা কেন পড়ি তলে  
কেউ দালালন কোঠার কোলে  
শুয়ে আরাম পায় ।।

সেই আমরা মরণের পরে  
যাব নাকি স্বর্গ পুরে  
কে মানিবে এসব হেরে  
এই দুনিয়ায় ।।

ভোগ করে ত্যাগ ভাল কথা  
এ সংসারে কে করে তা  
লালন বলে নাড়ি মাথা  
আন্দাজে সবায় ।।

### **Translation**

How the God is regarded justice?

If He is a real justice

Why does the discrimination of rich and poor

Prevail on earth?

If good and bad is equal

Why are we deprived?

Someone dwells in fine looking gorgeous building  
with enormous luxuries.

We the deprived are consoled

After death we will go to the heaven

What a vague!

Who the stupid agree with this deception in this world?

Sacrifice after enjoyment is a logical phenomenon

Even though none wants to do it

Lalon says all of us, the stupid fellows nod our head

In false assurance without comprehending anything.

This verse has sociological significance. All the religions and scriptures, consider God as the supreme and absolute and a symbol of justice, Lalon in this verse raised the question that how could God be the symbol of justice who allows discrimination among people prevailing on earth? How could God be a good judge himself who is the creator of such discrimination? Lalon criticized God for His one sided favor that he renders to some unscrupulous bad persons and keep them in very good condition whereas real good person fell victim of these unscrupulous persons, pass their lives in abject miseries. Lalon, for this reason says,

If good and bad are equal

Then why some are deprived?

Someone dwells in fine looking gorgeous building  
with enormous luxuries.

Lalon, further says that if God do justice to all, then why there should be poor and rich in the society? Everybody should get equal right in the kingdom of God. Ironically the society is divided into different classes that have created the social discrimination. Therefore, according Lalon's discrimination created by God cannot be termed as His symbol of justice.

সোনার মান গেলো বেঙ্গো পিতলের কাছে

শাল পটকের ফের

পাটের বনাত দেশ জুড়েছে ।।

বাজিল কলির আরতি

প্যাচ পলো ভাই মানির প্রতি

ময়ূরের নৃত্য দেখে

পেঁচায় পেখম ধরেছে ।।

শাল গ্রামকে করিয়ে নাড়া

ভূতের করে ঘণ্টা নাড়া

কলির ত এমনি দাড়া

স্থূল কাজে সব ভূল পড়েছে ।।

সবাই কিনে পিতল দানা

জহুরের মূল্য হলো না

লালন কয় জানা গেল

চটকে জগৎ মেতেছে ।।

## **Translation**

Gold is exchanged with raw silver  
What a stupidity!  
The timber of the Shal tree is driven away  
By the coreless stalks of hemp (jute).  
It is the bad outcome of the age of Koli  
In this rotten age the honoured have been dishonoured  
The ugly owl ridicules the peahen trying to have  
Dancing fashion spreading feathers back like the peahen.  
Deforesting the village  
People try to please the witch  
This Koli era invokes everybody to do wrong.  
Everybody buys silver with satisfaction  
Ignoring the precious gold instantly  
Perturbed Lalon says  
This world is besotted with the fake glistening of the silver.

The above is a very important verse of Lalon where he portrayed the picture of a distorted society and social system. In this society bad people are honored for their activities and the real honest persons are ignored. People in such a situation chose the wrong one and avoid good. Everyone in this bad time runs after silver for its false glittering and avoids the real gold. Lalon, in this verse portrayed the reality of his contemporary society. It reveals that a society lead by wrong people always chase after the false and wrong one. Therefore, the dream for an equitable society is a far cry. It is also mentionable that some utopian thinkers dreamt for an ideal society where there will be no wrong and falsehood; and everybody will be the worshipper of truth. This is possible only when a system of equitable justice could be implemented. Baul community never think in such a society only consisting of only honest persons , Baul thinkers always acknowledged that reality is society always consists of bad and good persons. . The society, according to Baul thinkers can never be consisted of only by absolute bad man or by absolute good man.

Fakir Lalon, by this way, through his verses portrayed the picture of the society that needs more sociological study along with its mystic interpretation. What we repeatedly wanted to say is that



Fakir Lalon Shah was a cultic sage and this is why, his verses bear the mystic philosophy, but at the same time he was also a very conscious member of his society for which his lyrics contains sociological significance simultaneously. For this reason, only mystic interpretation of Lalon's would fail to unveil Lalon's real genius. We should have sociological study on Lalo's lyrics for a complete comprehension of Lalon and his teaching and preaching. Here, it is needless to say that Lalon was a mystic philosopher, at the same time he was a social thinker as well.

## 10.6 Conclusion

Can Baul movement under the leadership of Lalon be regarded as a social movement? In view of our above discussions, it can be said that from sociological perspectives that Baul movement under the leadership of Lalon Shah could very well be termed as social movement. Lalon fought for bringing a positive change in a society heavily laden with the curse of repressive caste system, class hierarchy, social disparity, social discrimination, social oppression, religious bigotry, religious fundamentalism and oppression of upper class people on lower class population including sufferings of women. Many academics and people attempt to portray Lalon as a Aul and a Baul meaning an irresponsible, mad, mentally disordered person and a wandering minstrel who did not have any permanent resident to dwell. Neither he had any personal property, family life, social responsibilities. 'The word Baul was a literary adjective, but now Baul denotes a community, a way of life, and a philosophy. So there is difference between literary adjective Baul and Baul as a community, as a way of life and as a philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore in his essay 'An Indian Folk Religion' which was compiled in his book 'Creative Unity' considered Baulism as one of the most important folk religion, a way of life and religious movement, that worked for emancipation of the very common people from their socially degrading position. Rabindranath Thakur commented "I was attracted to find out how the living currents of religious movements work in the heart of the people, saving them from degradation imposed by the society of the learned, of the rich, or of the highborn; how the spirit of man, by making use even of its obstacles, reaches fulfillment, led thither, not by the learned authorities in the scriptures, or by the mechanical impulse of the dogma-driven crowd, but by the unsophisticated aspiration of the loving soul. On the inaccessible mountain peaks of theology the snows of creed remain eternally rigid, cold, and pure. But God's manifest shower falls direct on the plain of humble hearts, flowing there in various channels, even getting mixed with some mud

in its course, as it is soaked into the underground currents, invisible, but ever-moving.”(Pathak Samabesh;2013; Rabindra Oeuvre. vol-20;p. 513). It is needless to mention that it was none other but Lalon Shah who led Baulism to its zenith as a religious movement. Rabindranath himself became inclined towards Baulism and Lalon and that had been reflected in many of his lyrics and essays..

Lalon was a leader of Baul community and also was a Baul philosopher. *Hitakori* in one of its article carried out that “one may make mistake by hearing the name of Lalon Fakir as a mendicant. In fact he was not so at all. He was a family man and also owned some land properties as well the condition of his household was not bad. His household status was like middleclass family. When Lalon passed away, he left 2000 taka in cash. At the last stage of his life he became unable to earn. All his disciples helped him with donations. Lalon Shah had close affiliation with local elites and local Zaminder as well. He preached his ideology in different parts of his locality riding on horse-back. Researchers say that he had two big horses for his own use. In his Akhra 10 / 15 disciples always used in discussion on Baulism and then disseminated the same among common people. All these incidents had been described in the book *Jalalatul Fakara*. Lalon’s movement gradually took an institutional shape and it was a collective efforts of down trodden people of the society under Lalon’s leadership. As such Lalon’s movement could very well be termed as a social movement and Lalon obviously has an important space in the social history of Bengal.

We have earlier mentioned that the impact of Kolkata based social movements led by British colonial backed English educated elite class was very limited and was confined within the boundary of Kolkata city. It did not create any mentionable positive result for the common people at large. These movements were basically reformatory in nature. None of these movements was vocal about the welfare of common people or no movement of Kolkata raised any voice against zamindari atrocities and British suppressions. But movements that steamed in rural areas, though started basically as revivalist movements, but eventually these movements turned into mass revolution. And similarly the rural based movements also were sectarian in nature. Ironically these movements did not receive any ovation from the upper class caste elites of the society. Most of these rural movements concentrated only in the rural areas without involving the urban population. But Lalon’s movement interestingly left equal influence on the urban

population simultaneously with that of the rural mass. Baulism under Lalon at one side attracted the very common people, similarly, it also had attracted the elite class as well. It is not known whether Lalon went to Kolkata or not, but undoubtedly it can be said that Lalon's songs mesmerized people of all strata in Kolkata. Researchers found the influence of Lalon's philosophy in Brahma-songs. Influence of Lalon's lyrics in some of the poetries of Rabindranath is clearly visible. Rabindranath started his epic novel *Gora* by mentioning a song of Lalon Shah... "How does the unknown bird comes and goes out of the cage" and Binay an important character of *Gora* was mesmerized by the philosophy of the song. We also can mention that rural scholars like Kanganal Harinath Mojumder, Meer Mosharraf Hossain, Askhoy Kumar Moitrio, Jaldhar Sen and at the same time some urban elites like Khitimohan Sen, Askhoy Kumar Datta, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore and others member of Tagore family were fascinated by the philosophy of Lalon. By no means, Lalon's movement can be ignored that has immense sociological importance in our social history. The urban based 19th century social movements were Young Bengal Movement by Deorozi, Brahma Movement by Raja Rammohan, Bidhaba Bibaha movement by Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar. All these movements were Kolkata city based and had been led by urban educated elite class. In these movements no space was left for the poorer low caste people. All these urban movements could left very little positive outcome for the society. Shaktinath Jha a renowned Lalon researcher, in an interview evaluates the movements by Raja Rammohan and Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar as the movements which were lead by the caste Hindu elites and were meant for reforming the upper class Hindu society. He said in an interview Bidhaba Bibaha (widow mirage) was prevailed among lower class Hindu families. So Vidya Sagar's movement was meant for higher class Hindu families. Shaktinath jha mentioned further that Vidday Sagar's movement did not bring any holistic positive outcome in the society. Even today widow marriage widely has not been introduced spontaneously. On the other hand Sati movement by Raja Rammohan was similarly had not been accepted by the mass people. Even in 2014 in India a case of satee had been observed.' Therefore, it can be said that all the movements led by urban scholars were meant for reforming the social problems among elite class population. These movements did not have any impact on mass population and even could not impact positively the lower class population of the urban Kolkata. It hardly touched the rural area. But it is Lalon Shah who initiated his

movement for mass people especially rural mass people and his movements was successful in influencing urban upper caste Hindus too.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Viddya Sagar and some other contemporary Kolkata elites no doubt tried to unearth the root of some evil customs in the society in collaboration with various state organs and legislature. These elites later became renowned as social reformer. But Lalon the harbinger of rural social movement, who alone attempted for establishing a society based on equality, brotherhood and fraternity, a society where there will no humiliation, disparity and social discrimination, is yet to be recognized. Lalon's contribution, as social reformer, by no means is less than that of his contemporary urban social leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Iswar Chandra Biiddya Sagar and so on. Rather it can be said that in some instances the part played by Lalon for bringing positive pro people changes in the social structure was more glorious than his contemporary urban social reformers. Lalon Shah tried to awaken the illiterate, unconscious deprived, destitute people of rural Bengal. Lalon awakened them, raised their self-consciousness, self-mortification and self-dignity. It is high time for us to rethink about Lalon and give him his due without ignoring or keeping him aside as Baul. He is the father of rural renaissance of Bangladesh; we should realize it and write the name of Lalon with that of Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidday Sagar and others as social reformer. Lalon was a notable religious reformer, the worth preacher of secularism and the leader of proletariat people of Bengal.

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## CHAPTER 11

### Discussion and Conclusion

19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India witnessed unprecedented mass uprising in the form of socio-religious movements. These movements originated in the rural as well as in urban scenarios particularly in the province of Bengal presidency and later spread to other areas of India. These movements have both sociological and historical importance in the study of Bengal society as well as in analyzing the emergence of Indian nationalism. History depicts, these movements contributed to a great extent in social awakening of the mass population against social injustice. People became empowered and raised their voices against colonial plunder, inhuman social repression by the upper caste and class elites in connivance with their patron the English colonial rulers. These movements emerged at different points of time in different parts of the country. Yet they had certain similarities in their aims and perspectives. All of them demanded changes in society through “social and educational reforms, ranging from the relatively limited approach of defensive and self-consciously orthodox groups to radicals who articulated a sweeping condemnation of the status-quo” (Jones,K 1989:2).

The social movements that surfaced in Bengal in 19<sup>th</sup> century had twofold origins. Some movements originated in Kolkata by the English created new Hindu incipient Bourgeoisie class and the second kind were rural based movements which again had two different dimensions. The Kolkata based movements were basically social reform movements and the main goal of these movements was to protect Hinduism from the advent of the Christianity. During this period the intellectual awakening among the Kolkata based Hindu educated gentry in Bengal, is sporadically termed as Renaissance by some scholars. Ironically these movements were confined among the upper caste Hindus and none of these movements had any role in promoting the social and economic life of the wretched low caste Hindus and poor Muslim mass. The “so called Bengali renaissance was the culmination of the process of emergence of the cultural characteristics of the Bengali people, that had started in the age of HussainSha, it remained predominantly Hindu and only partially Muslim”(Sengupat, N: p210) . Moreover, “Renaissance, ( French: “Rebirth”) period in European civilization immediately following the Middle Ages and conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship and

values. The Renaissance also witnessed the discovery and exploration of new continents, the substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the decline of the feudal system and the growth of commerce, and the invention or application of such potentially powerful innovations as paper, printing, the mariner's compass, and gunpowder. To the scholars and thinkers of the day, however, it was primarily a time of the revival of Classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation”(Encyclopedia Britannica 2017 ). None of these above characteristics could be assigned to 19<sup>th</sup> century Kolkata based movements of the upper caste Hindus.

These movements differed from European Renaissance in all aspects. However; in spite of all the above lacking, these Kolkata based social movements of the upper caste and class Hindus questioned existing orthodoxies, particularly with respect to women, marriage, the dowry system, the caste division among Hindus and so on. But the aim endeavor was to liberalize Hindu orthodoxy; so that educated Hindu youths did not fall under Christian grip. Such movements were Brahmmo Samaj Andolon by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Satidaha Nibarun Andolon by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Young Bnegal Movements by Henry Vivian Louis de' rozio and so on. Thus in spite of their apparent progressive attitude, in no terms these movements can be compared with neither European renaissance, nor these movements could be termed as Indian Renaissance. These movements basically were reform movements and the basic aim was to liberalize caste Hinduism to protect Hindus from mass conversion to Christianity.

On the other hand in the rural areas of the then Bengal different rural mass upsurges against colonial plunder and exploitation by the newly created zamindars under British rule could be observed. Initially some of these movements were clad in the veil of religious fervor, but basically those were movements of the poor wretched mass population. In the course, these movements turned into armed revolts against the English rule and their agent the local autocratic zamindars. These movements continued for years but finally subsided gradually after taking over the administration by the British Imperial authority from the East India Company. In fact, the early years of British rule in India were marked by widespread peasant rebellions. Due to certain fiscal measures of the East India Company, a severe famine (1770 AD) wiped out almost two third of the population of Bengal. In history this famine is known as 'ChiattorerMonnonto'.

Ironically, this famine did not stop the English authority extorting money and crops of the peasants in different forms of taxes and through their local agents the Zamindar. Rural mass at one stage rose against such atrocities under different veils. Some of these mass upsurges were Sannyashi and Fakir Rebellions. A large number of Fakirs and Shannashys fleeced by the British rulers through various forms of extortion played an important role in organizing the peasants to revolt under the leadership of Fakir MaznuSha, Bhabanipathak, Devi Chowdhurani some other hosts of heroic figures. Besides Sannayasis and Fakirs, en masse participation of village artisans, peasants, and laborer was visible. These movements continued till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Another trend of religious movement likes that of 'Wahabi Andolon led by Haji Shariatullah, Dudu Mi and Mir Nisar Ali Titumir was also at the turned basically a peasant movement. What began as a religious reform movement soon turned into an armed revolt against British creted Zamindar class and their patron British imperial authority. Wahabi followers at its initial phase were basically poor Muslim peasants, but later on, many Hindu Rayots to get rid of inhuman torture and oppressions of the Zamindaras rendered their active supports to Wahabi movement. Sporadic peasant revolts found their culmination in the 1857 uprising, which in history is known as Sepoy mutiny. In actual, besides being a mutiny of Sepoys, this was an attempt of the old feudal nobility to snatch back power from the British authority. It also is an important component of social movements. All these were basically peasant revolts. Contemporary records provide ample information to measure the extent of the peasant participation in these movements. Even after 1857, after british imperial authority consolidated their grip over India, unrest among the peasants did not stop. Sporadic incidences of such movements against the British administration were common.

Alongside of the above movements, in the rural and urban scenario of Bengal, another defiant trend against the ruling social system and administration had also illuminated the social history of Bengal. These movements in history are known as folk religious movements or cult movements of Bengal.



Rural peasantry and artisans of this land that we now call Bangladesh, could be termed as the real architect of imperative national values, traditions, rituals, crafts and culture. These traditional values, social order and culture are yet to be diminished from our rural social life. Primal mode of production of the indigenous population of this land had been in existence along with that of feudal and semi feudal production system for centuries (Ronald Segal: The Crisis of India). Primordial culture, rituals and religious beliefs of the rural population still have parallel existence with that of urban cultural life. These beliefs and religious life pattern are different from that of ruling ideas and religions and are known as minor or folk religions.

Common essence of all these minor or folk religions was to promote the dignity of human being and based on this philosophy of life, exploited people of the lower social stratum ventured to explain the reasons for their wretched day to day life experiences added with oppressions and suppressions of the upper class population of the society on them. These minor religions provided psychological supports and sheltered these poor people by enlightening them on the meaning of life and living from humanistic view point. These religions taught the exploited rural mass how to fight against all odds of life. The philosophical outlook of all these minor religions is commonly called '*LokayataDarshan;*' meaning Philosophy of the mass people. Renowned Indologist Rhys Davis stated Lokayat means "*LokeshuAyata*" meaning which ordinary folk people could take control of. Thus *LokayataDarshan* is the philosophy which folk people could take hold of. Lokayat philosophical trend was dialectically opposite to the philosophy and ideas of the ruling elites. Emergence of Lokayata philosophy could be termed as a tacit revolt of the oppressed mass, against religious and cultural dominance of the ruling class. It was the Vedanta philosophy of the Aryan conquerors which could be said to be the root cause for the development of Lokayata philosophy in Indian sub-continent.(Ibid: 74)

Baulism emerged as a minor Lokyata religion from the soil of Bengal and could be termed as the cultural invention of our ancestors. The core essence of Lokayata philosophy is to portray human being as the supreme truth and it denies in the existence of any supernatural power. Obviously this idea of the Lokayat Philosophy, was against the class interests of the ruling elites. As a result, conflicts between Lokayata Philosophy and Philosophy of the ruling class gradually became apparent. Ruling philosophies were idealistic in nature, as opposed to the Lokayata

ideas, which were by nature materialistic. Lokayata philosophy ruled out the existence of supernatural being or power as a controlling force of the living beings and nature. Rather this philosophy believed in the supremacy of men and thus proclaimed that ultimate truth is human being and religion is nothing but is a means for the rulers to exploit mass people. The end result was, Lokayata Philosophy failed to earn any recognition or supports, rather faced severe opposition from the rulers. Thus two dialectically opposite philosophical trend in ancient India could be visible-the Lokayata (Folk based) Philosophy and Philosophy of the ruling class. The common characteristic of all Lokayata philosophy is their protesting nature against all discrimination in the name of religions and to uphold the dignity and supremacy of human beings.

As a minor religion, Baulism gathered its philosophical essence from the traditional Lokayata philosophy. Though Baulism started its institutional journey in the mid seventeenth century, but it has a long history. In course of its long journey Baulism in mid 17<sup>th</sup> century could finally establish itself as the most popular minor religious idea among the sub altern population of this land. Thus it can be said that Baulism as the philosophy of the people of lower class, emerged as a tacit revolt against the ruling philosophy- the philosophy of the higher class of the society.

In Nineteenth century Bengal, Baulism reached its zenith with the appearance of Fakir Lalon Shah as Baul Guru.<sup>1</sup> Indeed under his gifted guidance during this period of history, Baulism spread all over Bengal. The role of Fakir Lalon Shah as the 'Guru' of 19<sup>th</sup> century Baul community carries historical significance in constructing the social history of Bengal. Lalon through his lyrical songs sent messages to the down trodden population to uphold the dignity of human being. His teaching had tremendous impact on the poor, exploited segment of the population of Bengal. His teaching left various directions about life and living of the lower stratum population of the society. His activities were not confined within preaching religious sermons only; rather he also literally organized mass people to fight against all social oppressions and persecutions of the upper class.

During his long span of life, Lalon witnessed significant events and changes that took place in Bengal. These changes and developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal could be termed as the

direct consequences of British conquest of India. The colonial rule of East India Company in Bengal impacted both positively and negatively on the life and living of the people. Positively, British rule introduced new technology, English education and so on, that ushered in a new era in India. But the negative consequences were excessively grave.

To concentrate their power and authority in their newly conquered colony, British colonial authority completely devastated the social fabrics of the country, firstly, by sapping the authority and the status of former ruling class under Moghul rule comprised of both Hindus and Muslims, secondly, British rule at the same time destroyed the rural well to do class and rural industries; and thirdly, by creating a new landed aristocracy with land ownership that was formerly unknown in Bengal. At the same time British rulers replaced Farsi by introducing English as the official language.

Through these measures British rule formerly could create a flunky broker class who in the language of Lord Maculay 'will be Indian in physical stature and color but mentally they will be British.' Combining impacts of these developments were unprecedented. These policies of the new rulers of India ultimately impacted heavily on the social structure of the country and consequently created many social and economic changes and anomalies especially in the rural life of Bengal.

The measures by the British colonial rulers paved the way for the emergence of new feudal nobility in Bengal. Alongside, to serve the commercial interests of the British rulers, the City of Kolkata gradually developed under the patronage of the new rulers in India, Centering Kolkata an English educated Hindu middle class surfaced in Bengal, a class, which was formerly unknown. The collective effect of wealth and education created social awakening among the urban Hindu upper class residents of Kolkata. Different social and political institutions, organizations developed in Kolkata under the leadership of the newly educated Hindu middle class created by the British rulers. Institutions like Hindu Mela, National Congress, BrahmnoSamajetc played key roles in creating national awakening among the newly educated Hindu aristocracy and also patronized to promote education and knowledge among urban population of Kolkata. During this period of history, Raja Rammohun Roy, introduced and

established Brahmmo religious movement. Social reform movements by Vidyasagar and Rammohun also got momentum during the same period. Favorable wind started propelling in the arena of art and literature of Bengal centering Kolkata. The educational, political, social, cultural, literature, religious life, of Bengal became illuminated with the appearance of personalities like Rammohun (1772-1830), RadhakantaDev(1783-1867), Deroggio(1809-1831), Debendranath Thakur(1817-1905), Biddyasagar(1820-1891), Modhushudan Dutta (1824-1873), Akkhya Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), RamkrishnaPoromhansa (1836-1886), Keshob Chandra (1838-1884), Bankimchandra(18938-1894) and later Rabindranath Thakur.

Based on Kolkata, 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal in reality was humming with different activities in the field of education, culture and religion, But it needs to be remembered that patronized by the British colonial rulers this awakening was basically Kolkata based and impacted only on the life and living of the upper class Hindu population living within the edge of Kolkata city. It took much time to reach the benefits of these movements throughout Bengal by crossing the boundary of Kolkata city.

The above was not the whole truth of British conquest. Introduction of permanent settlement act of 1793 by the British rulers created a new landed aristocracy with ownership rights in land formerly unknown in Bengal. History tells us, the introduction of Permanent settlement and the creation of new zamindars, have had a tremendous negative impact on the mass population of Bengal and consequently a severe famine grasped the whole of Bengal which in history is known as ‘ChiattarerMasnantar’. Almost two third population of Bengal wiped out due to this famine. All these events resulted in armed mass upsurges against the British rule in the country.

Lalon witnessed in his life time all these armed uprisings against British rule such as Sepoy Mutiny, Revolt by Titumir, Wahabi-Farazi movement Indigo revolt, Fakir and Sannashi Bidroho, etc. Except Sepoy mutiny most of these armed rebellions were rural based and were confined in Bengal and neighboring provinces. These armed rebellions against the British were mainly concentrated among the poor, wretched population of rural areas of the country. These movements and their ideologies impacted on the life of Lalon and helped him to construct his own philosophy of Humanity. The proclamation of highness of humanity was the core of Lalon’s

philosophy. The main message of his philosophy was to love fellow human beings. His philosophy disclosed “God lives within the human soul” and as such one can reach god by serving humanity only. One need not have to follow different religions and rituals to reach God. To him human-body is holier place than that of mosque, temple, pagoda and church. In his view Lalon said ‘man is the creator of God and human mind is the real chamber where God dwells. His philosophy could be compared with the philosophy of Socrates, IbnulArabi, Rumi and Hafeez.<sup>ii</sup> His philosophy though contains metaphysical ideas but it has elements of materialism in a subtle way. He puts more emphasis on the application of wisdom instead of utopia. Lalon said:

‘God, Goddess and all sorts of worship and prayer  
Are not mystic but man created.  
Human’s imagine cannot conceive  
The image of invisible phenomenon.’

Lalon’s disciple and worthy successor Dabir Uddin alias Doddu Shah also endorsed it unconditionally. He says,

‘Man’s caste or religion  
At all is not the creation of God.’

For his liberal and progressive thinking Lalon was condemned, harassed and victimized in his contemporary society. Both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists opposed him vehemently. His contemporary Muslims portrayed Lalon as a heretical rustic Fakir, while Hindus considered him as a pervert person of low origin. Lalon’s sermons and teaching were never accepted by the religious and social leaders of his contemporary society and even now Lalon did not receive his due recognition from the upper stratum population in a proper manner. In spite of all odds, to reach his desired goal Lalon made his religious homily as the medium for social teaching.

Lalon was born and brought up in a rural set up. Moreover he was an illiterate Baul who used to practice esoteric rituals and ascetic performances. As such neither he had any scope to know about the Kolkata based activities of the newly emerged educated Bengali Hindu middle class, nor it was necessary for him to be familiar with these activities and happenings in Kolkata. He was not academically endowed to become enthused by such activities in Kolkata.

In spite of his ignorance about new movements in Kolkata, Lalon through his lyrics, songs, philosophy and ascetic practices could create a mesmerizing effect among the rural mass. The impact that he could spread over the rural life and mass population of Bengal was amazing. Some scholars compared his role in rural mass awakening with that of Raja Rammohun Roy (Chowdhury A.A.: P 11: 2004). In the modern history of India Raja Rammohun Roy is honored for his humanistic views and for his apparent efforts to unify different religious values under one umbrella which resulted in the emergence of Brahmno movements in Bengal. Thus Rammohun is honored as “Bharat Pathik” meaning ‘The Path finder of India’ and is considered as the pioneer of so called Bengal renaissance. History depicts that Rammohun’s endeavor actually was to protect Vedic Hinduism from the aggression of Christianity and not to promote equality, fraternity and brotherhood among people from humanistic point of view as Lalon did.

Ironically, Lalon’s social thinking and his passion for humanity remained neglected and mostly unrecognized. Only a few scholars made stray mention of Lalon in their writings. Amalendu Dey while discussing about Lalon’s influence on folk life of Bengal and while making a comparative analysis of the role of Rammohun and Lalon wrote” Lalon the mystic poet of Bengal was contemporary to Rammohun (1774-1890)...I did not find any evidence or dialogue on Lalon while discussing about his contemporary Raja Rammohun Roy...Lalon, during his long lifetime composed innumerable lyrical music and through these music he shaped and preached his philosophy and religious views...In rural Bengal untold numbers of lyrical music composed by Baul preachers and mystic poets still remained untraced. Discussion on these lyrics and music could throw light on Baul religion and its impact in Bengal. We can also make a comparative analysis on the role of Rammohun and Lalon in preaching liberal humanism. This will make clear about the wisdom of Kolkata based intellectuals and of neglected mass people of rural Bengal. It will be clear to us that though these neglected rural mass could not come in contact with the western culture and education like that of Kolkata based intellectuals, but their way of thinking influenced by the mystic lyricists and devotees like Lalon, were in no way less richer than that of the former. Unfortunately, while discussing the role of Rammohun, in so called Bengal renaissance, the scholars ignored the importance of these elements of folk culture in creating a social history of mass awakening in rural Bengal”.

This Kolkata based so called renaissance of Bengal could not facade any non sectarian, liberal universal humanitarian ethical views. The Bengali Muslim community or the rural poor and schedule caste Hindus of colonial Bengal, who were deprived of modern western education had no linkage with the so called Bengali renaissance. On the one side, illiteracy, conservative thinking, and false idea of nationalism among the Muslims of the then Bengal as well as, on the other side the idea of cultural differences of the caste Hindus and their disrespect, apathetic attitudes towards Bengali Muslim community barred the Muslims to become emotionally involved in the Bengali renaissance movement. That is why, this so called renaissance of Bengal in no way can be termed as the outcome of joint efforts of Hindu and Muslim communities neither had it helped to unify Hindus and Muslims. Rather as a consequence, contradictions, differences and hatred between Hindus and Muslims of Bengal became evident. The so called renaissance influenced the development of modern Bengali literature to some extent negatively and as a consequence, still contains reminiscences of such racial animosity. Along with the endeavor of the Kolkata based urban English educated Hindu middle class for so called mass awakening, a mass movement for sowing the seeds of self realization among the socially deprived rural mass was silently and quietly taking place in the rural arena of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. In Baul songs, particularly in the preaching and songs of Lalon, this endeavor was evident which had paved the way for harmony among rural people irrespective of their caste creed and religion.

One of the pre-condition of European renaissance was non communal humanism. This became manifested and got momentum in the preaching and messages of these illiterate rural preachers of Bengal and the soul of this unfettered humanistic movement was Lalon fakir.(Chowdhury A.A. P12). As such we may say that Lalon's philosophy stands for rural renaissance **in Bengal**. One of the significant characteristics of renaissance is humanism and logical interpretation of phenomenon and these characteristics are clearly visible in the philosophy of Lalon. From this view point Lalon could be regarded as the pioneer of rural renaissance in Bengal. Like 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Feurbach, Lalon in essence was a materialist but at the end who turned into an idealist. In spite of this lacking, his teaching has had a great impact on the rural awakening of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Like his contemporary European materialist Philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who said " God did not as the Bible says ,create man in His image ; on the contrary man, as I have shown in the *Essence of Christianity* , made God in His image" Lalon

also uttered “ .....” . But like Feurbach, Lalon also could not realize that the social existence of men determines their consciousness. Love, humanity, fellow feelings all these qualities are actually are the products of man’s material condition, these do not exist inside man as Marx stated “.....it is not the consciousness of man that determines their existence, but their social existence determines their consciousness” (As quoted by Rizer: p 66 ). In spite of his idealist philosophical outlook Lalon played a significant role in organizing oppressed down trodden subaltern population of Bengal, by giving a sigh of relief to their daily life and living , and showed the way to live a life with dignity and honor.

Many folk movements ideologically challenged the authority of the classical religious ideas in the history of mankind. Basically these movements are organized by the peasants or the producers’ class and are directed against the plundering and extorting the products of the labor of the laborer, against exploitation of the people. Exploited mass population, attempts to stand against the structural frame of the exploitation based on social norms and religion. Baulism is one of such folk religious movements and reached its zenith under the leadership of Lalon Shah. The end aim of such movements was to achieve a society based on social justice, and a society where people can ascertain that human being could flourish their natural talents and establish oneself as a real human being in the society. The basic aim of the peasant movements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal was to establish a society where they could leave with dignity and honor. These movements had limited intention of overthrowing the British rule. These movements finally could not sustain in the face of British all out aggression. But Lalon’s idea was different. He tried to change the mindset of the exploited poor wretched mass people through his mesmerizing teaching and preaching on human dignity and supremacy of human being. This was a direct challenge against established religious and social norms of the society. He was successful in organizing large section of down trodden people in rural Bengal, guided them towards a meaningful, dignified life. And, Lalon’s teaching and preaching still has strong humane appeal to people of all classes. In spite of his idealistic philosophical outlook, Lalon no doubt could be termed as an icon of a social movement that aimed at establishing a society based on fraternity, brotherhood and equality in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.



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