



# **UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORING THE MUSIC OF THE BAULS OF BENGAL**

**DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM  
2015-16**

**MARCH, 2016**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “*Understanding and Exploring the Music of the Bauls of Bengal*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Bauls are a group of wandering minstrels indigenous to West Bengal. They are best known for their unique music and alternative lifestyle. The Baul culture formed as a result of the persecution of lower classes of Hindu and Islamic society by religious orthodoxy. The Baul culture comprises of two main parts- Music and Philosophy.

The data in this report has been collected through primary research conducted over a ten day trip and secondary research done over a period of approximately four months. The primary research was conducted in Kolkata, Shantiniketan, Tarapeeth and Joydeb Kenduli. The report catalogues and analyses this data with the help of secondary sources. The report looks at Baul music through an ethnomusicological perspective, documenting the evolution in Baul music from its conception to modern times. As Baul music is a reflection of Baul philosophy, this report also serves as a lens through which we have looked at changes in Baul culture.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

The Bauls are indigenous musicians of West Bengal. A prevalent religious and musical group in Bengal, they are best known for their poems and songs centred on God. They are primarily composed of two religious sects- The Vaishnavite Hindus and Sufi Muslims. Currently, most know the Bauls for their brand of music (Ray).

To be a Baul is a matter of inward truth i.e. an esoteric concept not necessarily dependant on formal initiation or adherence to particular beliefs (Capwell). Even though they all follow Baul Philosophy, the Bauls are not a part of a monolithic group. Each Baul has his or her interpretation of the songs they sing and the philosophy they espouse (Knight). The primary tenet that most Bauls agree upon is that Baul philosophy is centred around the quest for *moner manush*. This coincides with the ultimate aim of Baul philosophy -to return to oneself or *sahaja*, i.e. enlightenment. (Dasgupta). Music, however, is an important part of the Baul philosophy.

A point to be noted here is that in the Baul culture, the words ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy’ are sometimes used interchangeably. In this report, we will be focusing on Baul philosophy and its relationship with Baul music.

### Origin of the Baul Culture

The origins of the word *Baul* can be traced back to the 15th century. The word is mentioned in *Chaitanya-bhagavata* as well as in the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* by Vrindavanadas and Krishnadas Kaviraj respectively (“About Baul Tradition”). However, certain scholars believe that the term was also used synonymously to mean “mad”. Some scholars like Shashibhusan Das Gupta have traced the word back to *Vatula*, meaning ‘divinely inspired insanity’ and *Vyakula*, meaning ‘impatiently eager’. This meaning is consistent with Baul Philosophy, which revolves around the reverse path, i.e. the method through which a Baul can finally realize their union with God (“About Baul Tradition”).

Some scholars believe that the Baul movement stemmed from Birbhadra, the son and disciple of Vaishnavite saint Nityanand. On the other hand, some believe that Bauls came from 8<sup>th</sup> century Persian minstrels, the Ba'al ("About Baul Tradition"). What most scholars and academics can agree on is that Baul culture as we know it today originated in Bengal, which is now divided into Bangladesh and West Bengal.

As a culture, it draws its main influences from Tantrism, Sufi Islam, Vaishnavism and Buddhism. Tantric sects like the Kartabhajas and the Buddhist Sahija (*Sahajiya*) also have influenced the practices of the Bauls. As some aspects of Baul philosophy talks about enlightenment through coitus, some influences are said to be taken from the ancient Indian art form of Yoga. Charles Capwell believes that the tantric Siddhacarya sect of Buddhism are the ancestors of the Bauls. Both of these sects place a lot of importance on the Guru from whom they learn coitus through yoga and both sects reject orthodox mainstream religion and sing in riddles (Capwell). The process of *sahaja* was heavily influenced by the Sufi tradition of Islam (Dasgupta).

“The body is a small boat, the mind is the punting-pole.  
Hold the helm by the instructions of the guru.  
Steadying thought, take hold of the boat;  
By no other means does one get across.  
The boatman tows his boat with a rope.  
Merging again and again with the Innate, one may not go any other way.  
On the way there are fearful, strong pirates.  
In the tornado of existence, the possessions are lost.  
Hugging the shore, it goes upstream against a strong current.  
Sarahi says, “It enters the sky.”(Capwell)

Along with music, the Baul tradition of ritualized coitus also forms the basis of enlightenment in Buddhist Sahajiya sects. The boat metaphor in this song is very similar to those found in Sahajiya *Charyapadas*. The *Sahajiya* concept of merging with the innate is very similar to that of the quest of finding a *moner manush*. There are many more Baul songs which draw parallels with that of the *Charyapadas*. This could suggest that a major part of the Baul tradition originated from the Sahajiya cult (Capwell).

Other than the region in which they are prevalent, not much is really known about the origin of the Bauls; mainly due to the fact that it is an oral tradition. Dr Jeanne Openshaw believes that the Baul tradition was not properly documented until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it came into contact with outsiders (“About Baul Tradition”). The multitude of folk stories surrounding different theories regarding the origin of the Bauls has given scholars multiple angles from which the origins of Baul culture can be studied. This could be one of the reasons for different myths regarding the origins of the Bauls. The most popular myths are associated with the figure of Lalon Fakir, who will be discussed further on.

### **Proposed Theories on the Origin of Baul Culture**

There are various theories on the origins of Baul Culture. These theories will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. However, some of the main theories on the origin of Baul culture are given below.

According to one theory, it is believed that the Baul movement may have originated from the *Bhakti* Movement that engulfed India in the period between 14th and 17th century. The movement originated in South India, but spread up to North India. Famous people associated with the Bhakti movement and who helped spread it from South India to the North include Ravidas, Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Meera Bai, Surdas, Kabir, Tulsidas, Tukaram and several others (Haque).

There are two reasons that have been given for the origin and evolution of the *Bhakti* movement: First, the Hindu caste system interfered with *Sanatana Dharma*, the original philosophy of the *Hindu Dharma* or Hinduism. This in turn led to the social ostracism of lower castes on religious grounds. At the same time, Muslim rulers in the country were converting people to Islam by force. As a counter-movement, the saints and leaders of the *Bhakti* movement preached a philosophy which did not lay heavy emphasis on the rituals and castes that were followed so rigorously by organised religions. Instead, these saints propounded that people could put aside the complexities on the philosophies of different religions and express their devotion simply by showing their love for God. In the state of Bengal, this movement was impacted to a large extent by Chaitanya Dev and his Nadiya school of Vaishnavite teachings (Haque). Maqsoodul Haque believed that revolutionist

movements such as this were bound to happen as people from South Asia were “traditionally and culturally opposed to any form of dogmatism, religious bigotry or theocracy.”

Earlier, the Sindh invasion of India by Muhammad Bin Qasim in the 8<sup>th</sup> century led to the spread of Islam. However, the original orthodoxy brought in by the early Arab conquerors was soon challenged by the peak of the *Bhakti* movement. Additionally, the traditions of the Islamic religion as brought by Sufi Saints from Iraq, Yemen, Turkey and Persia were relatively liberal and were accepted by the Indian society. It was seen that the form of Islam preached by Sufi Saints had ideologies similar to those of the *Bhakti* movement. According to historical sources, the Mughal Emperor Akbar patronised a “syncretism of faith” which was exactly like that of the Bauls (Haque).

“This spirit of tolerance and co-operation was strikingly demonstrated in the policies of Akbar, the Moghul emperor, who reigned from 1560 to 1605 and who respected all faiths. Out of sensitivity to the Hindus, he became a vegetarian, gave up hunting, and forbade the sacrifice of animals on his birthday or in the Hindu holy places. In 1575 he founded a House of Worship, where scholars from all religions could meet to discuss God. Here, apparently, the Jesuit missionaries from Europe were the most aggressive. He founded his own Sufi order, dedicated to 'divine monotheism' (tawhid-e-ilahi), which proclaimed a radical belief in the one God who could reveal himself in any rightly-guided religion. Islam in its original sense of 'surrender' to God could be achieved by any faith: what he certainly called 'Muhammad's religion' did not have the monopoly of God.”(Haque)

Thus, the anti-orthodoxy preached by both Sufism and the *Bhakti* movement is often believed to have been a significant contributor to the emergence of Baul culture in West Bengal.

History also states that about two hundred years before the *Bhakti* movement, Bangladesh was a very prominent centre of Buddhism-. Later on, genocides perpetrated by *Senas* and Muslim invaders largely reduced the population of the natives of Bangladesh, pushing them towards an alternative worldview- Buddhism. Buddhist philosophy also shared aspects of Sufi and *Bhakti* philosophy such as non-orthodoxy and universal brotherhood, the same aspects that can later be observed within the Baul culture. Thus, we can say that Buddhism was another prevalent religion that influenced the Bauls (Haque)



## The Baul Way of Life

As outlined above, Baul culture has heavily been influenced by various practices and beliefs, like those found in Sufism, Vaishnavism and *Sahajiya* and *Siddhacarya* Buddhism. One trait shared by most of these cultures is their rejection of orthodox religion, and disregard for dividing hierarchies like caste (Capwell).

Sahajiya Vaishnavism and Buddhism were heavily influenced by Tantrism. This influence has permeated down into Baul culture. Bauls are tantrics, and this has led many of them to believe that the body is a microcosm of the universe in which the Supreme Being resides, and that it is the only instrument for gaining liberation and conquering death (Menger).

As stated previously, being a Baul is a matter of truth and self, and does not depend upon adherence to a set of beliefs or initiation into the cult. Bauls reject all forms of religious orthodoxy, which promotes discrimination and other bigoted beliefs like that of the caste system. The caste system was a hegemonic structure introduced by higher Hindu castes. Instead, adherence to the path of love is of utmost importance. This heterodoxy enables Bauls to see beyond the illusion of idol worship and division on the basis of class and caste, further pushing each Baul to find his or her own path to Salvation (Capwell).

According to Upendranath Bhattacharya, an essential part of the Baul's religious path is that of sexual *yoga*. A ritualized coitus reservatus performed on three successive days during a woman's menstruation cycle is essential to Baul initiation. This form of *yoga* is to be taught by a guru who sees the potential to become a Baul in a disciple. These discoveries paint a different outlook of the Bauls (Capwell). Capwell believes that the Bauls are thought to keep their sexual practices secret because the thought of using it for spiritual means may come off as eccentric and degenerate to the eyes of the public.

References to sexual practices amongst the Bauls is not surprising considering that some of their core beliefs pertain to human sexual organs. The Bauls further believe that the Divine is manifested in its two forms as the active and the passive in human sexual organs. The active form appears during women's monthly menstruation. God resides in the highest yogic center, or the third eye, but regularly descends while abandoning people who ignore the

esoteric truth preached by the Bauls. Through coitus during menstruation, they seek to immobilize this pair-principle, and thus reach God, also known as the passive state. The lyrics found in one of Lakshman Das Baul's songs, says that following the reverse path and descending to the lowest physical state, also known as the *mudadhar* or six petals, and then transcending up to the highest- two petals, transforms the desire for enlightenment into devotion (Capwell). Some scholars also believe that the Bauls use tantric *yoga* to reverse or break the cosmic cycle of death and rebirth (Menger). These beliefs help justify the Baul concept of the body being a microcosm, or a small representation of the universe that is all around us.

However, an important point missed by a lot of scholars is the role of music in the *Sahajiya* Path. During our on-field research, most of the Bauls we came across repeatedly talked about the role of music in their lives, and its relation to Baul philosophy. In "The Popular Expression of Religious Syncretism: The Bauls of Bengal as Apostles of Brotherhood", Charles Capwell enumerates the importance of Baul music in a Baul's daily life. Bauls paint a portrait of their daily life by speaking their mind using their songs. These songs are combined with dance to produce a state of ecstasy, wherein they unite with god, or find their *moner manush*. Capwell compares this state of being to the state of *fana* attained by Sufi Fakirs.

Their musical system is the result of a *Guru-Sishya* system where *Gurus* teach their *sishyas* the Baul way of life (Capwell, 1988). This system of learning instils Baul philosophy into *Sishyas*. This curriculum includes different streams of learning like mathematics, spirituality and Baul music theory. Baul music is unique because it follows scales, tones and rhythms indigenous only to Baul culture (Capwell, 1988).

Even though Baul philosophy incorporates values from different religions like Sufism, Vaishnavism and Sahajiya Buddhism, it agglomerates into a philosophy unique to Baul culture through their use of music. Baul music is their most important form of expression, as it is delivered in such a way that it appeals to common man. Anubrato Ghatak mentioned how the music "pokes" the listener in such a way that it seizes their attention. He also said that this ability gave Baul music a special place in Bengali culture.

An article on IndianOpines details the effects of commercialization on Baul music. The article says that the commercialization of Baul music brought about two types of Bauls- Commercial Bauls who only play the music, and true Bauls, who play music to follow to *Sahajiya* Path. This aspect of Baul culture will be discussed further in the report.

As Bauls express themselves through their music, it would be best to understand the daily life of the Bauls through a study of their music. Thus, this report will also address the importance of music in a Bauls daily life.

### **Geographical Information**

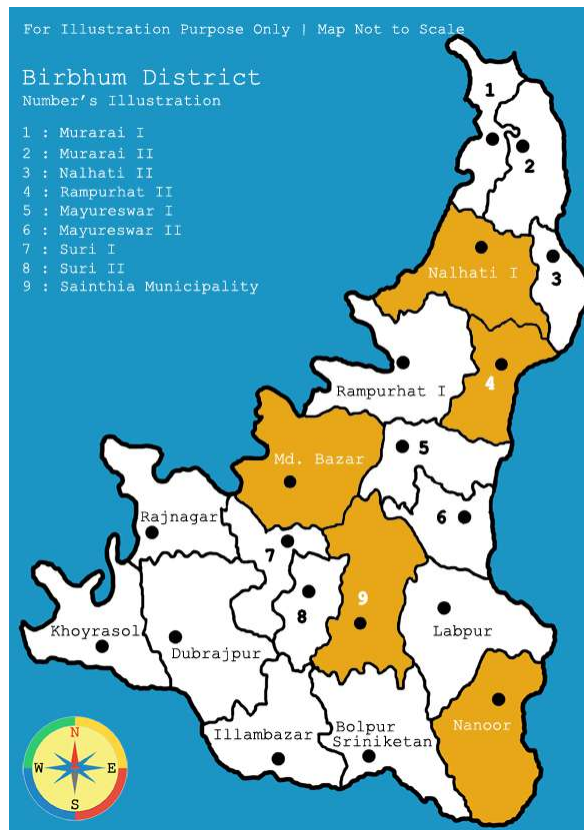
Before the partition, the Bauls were primarily found in Bengal. However, the partition of Bengal in 1947 divided the state into two parts, West Bengal- belonging to India, and Bangladesh- now an independent country. Upon the study of secondary resources, we realized that there were three main hotspots of Baul activity- Kolkata, Shantiniketan and Joydev Kenduli, located in the Kolkata and Birbhum districts of West Bengal respectively.



1.1. A map of West Bengal (*Map Of West Bengal*)

We decided to visit these three areas in order to gather research for this report. We first visited Kolkata to attend two Baul melas, to get a better understanding of Baul music and its link to Baul philosophy. As this would be a gathering of Bauls, we also looked at the different types of Bauls, and the effects of commercialization on them.

From Kolkata we travelled to the small town of Shantiniketan, located near Bolpur in Birbhum district. Located 160 kilometres north of Kolkata, the town was the birthplace of Tagore, who was influenced by Baul philosophy. Shantiniketan is also the home to several groups of Bauls and fairs, like that of the Poush Mela.



1.2. A map of the Birbhum district in West Bengal (*Birbhum Map*)

Joydev Kenduli is a village 40 kilometres from Shantiniketan. Though the village has a population of around 2755, the village hosts the Annual Baul fair, a gathering of Bauls from across the country. We also visited Tarapeeth, the home of Kanhai Das Baul, an 80 year old blind Baul.

By visiting major cities like Kolkata and small towns like Joydev Kenduli, we aimed to interact with both, Bauls who were considered commercial and popular, as well as traditional Bauls. However, our primary locations of study were in Shantiniketan and Kolkata.

## Research Question

It is in the nature of a culture to grow, change and evolve with the progress of time. As a culture interacts with other cultures and as is passed down from generation to generation, certain rituals, practices or even beliefs may be forgotten or may simply change. The practices and beliefs of other cultures may be incorporated or adopted. The Baul culture

would be no exception to this. Baul culture draws influences from various different cultures like Sufism, Vaishnavism, Tantrism and *Sahajiya* Buddhism.

Initially, we had planned on studying the history and culture of the Bauls and their prevalence today. We also wanted to study the role of Bauls as social agents, as we had heard that they were being used by the government to spread social change. We planned on studying Baul culture as a whole, and its change over time. However, upon consultation with our mentor, we realized that this topic was too vast for our study, as we would have to get as much information as possible during our on-field study in Bengal.

Upon further discussion, we remembered why we had initially found the Baul culture so intriguing that we felt compelled to learn more about it- their music. Hence we decided to rework our research question in order to focus more on this integral albeit comparatively seldom researched aspect of Baul culture.

Music plays an important role in Baul philosophy and culture. It is through music and song that the Bauls express themselves. Their music, as any other aspect of culture, is subject to evolution. These changes when observed and analyzed can tell much about the people behind the philosophy and the people who still practice it. Thus, we narrowed down our research question to cater to Baul music, with the added research advantage it is the most accessible form of Baul culture.

We planned to trace the evolution of Baul Music since its origin but came to realize that Baul music is something that cannot be understood without first understanding its deeper meaning i.e. philosophy, since it was primarily used as a means of spreading spiritual teachings. As a result, we also planned on briefly touching upon the link between Baul philosophy and music- in terms of its composition and content.

We also came across a lot of previous research and articles on the effects of globalization and modernization on Baul music due to international exposure. As the implications of this does affect the further evolution of Baul music, we decided to include this element into our study.

## **Aims and Objectives**

Baul music is central to the Baul way of life. While a lot of prior research on the Bauls has been centred on the composition of the music, our current study aims to investigate their music from an ethnomusicological perspective. This includes several other aspects such as the history, the origin and the esoteric beliefs and traditions in connection to the music. We aimed to trace the origin of the Bauls historically and geographically in order to get a context of the evolution and movement of Baul music, before tracing its evolution in terms of outside influences on its composition and underlying philosophy.

As Baul music is a Baul's reflection of the *Sahajiya* path, the study of its evolution will also reveal a lot in terms of the beliefs and ideals that the culture holds in highest regard. When we understand how and why certain elements of the culture changed, what aspects were incorporated, which ideals lost importance, we understand more about the nature of people themselves. Another aspect of the study was the change in Baul music in the face of globalization as many studies suggest that Bauls are straying away from their core ideals by opting for a materialistic way of life. Our main objective therefore, was to study the evolution of the music of the Baul culture, using it as a lens to study the people of the same community.

## **Research Methodology**

In order to make the best of this opportunity given to us, we have decided to utilise our time on and off the field in an effective manner by employing the following strategies:

### **1. Preliminary Research**

As a part of pre-field research, we decided to find different material on Baul culture. We went through books, academic articles and newspaper articles in order to understand Baul culture and its relevance in modern times. We decided to study their music as a facet of their culture and philosophy. We wanted to explore various aspects before entering the field to give us a background on Baul culture and what to expect. These aspects included the origin, history, beliefs and traditions, philosophy, ideology and music of the Baul community.

## 2. On- Field Research

After extensive discussion and study of secondary resources, we came to the conclusion that the information we gathered on Baul music was descriptive and evaluative, but not very explanatory. It is descriptive in the sense that it describes the situation of the Bauls in today's context; evaluative because it involves the evaluation of the Baul culture as a social phenomenon that occurred a significant number of years back. Scholarly articles on Baul music critically evaluated it was a music form, and failed to address music with reference to Baul philosophy, and vice-versa. Since it is on a subject that has not been documented vastly, the raw data we gathered was not too explanatory. Our research can also be looked at as a comparative study because it compares the present condition of the Baul culture and ideologies to its past- although this comparison is less technical and more descriptive, like much of our other data. However, it did provide us with sufficient information to comment on the changing trends and analyze them by related them to secondary sources.

For our interviews, we decided to segregate our respondents into four categories:

1. Bauls
2. Persons affiliated with the Bauls (A broad spectrum from close friends of Bauls to performance audiences and organizers)
3. Academics/ Baul Researchers
4. Audience

We segregated and formed separate questionnaires for each category that elicit specific information pertinent to our research question. The interviews were semi-structured and allowed for improvisation on-field. This we felt was appropriate when interviewing the Bauls, who are known to jump from topic to topic seemingly at random. We obtained a lot of respondents through the use of snowball sampling.

On the field, most of our visual documentation was done primarily through videography, as well as the creation of a photo journal. We documented performances we attended, interviews, the general atmosphere of the mela we went to, audience members and the beautiful scenes of West Bengal's villages.



## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Our research on the Bauls of West Bengal deals primarily with the evolution of their music. However, in a culture where music and philosophy is so intertwined, we also need to look at aspects of their ethnology that play an important part in the creation and propagation of Baul Music. These aspects could include their origins, ideology, lyricism, geographical spread, changes in music etc. After extensive research, we put together a number of secondary resources that will finally aid us during our research process on field. These sources have been reviewed in this chapter of our report under different subheadings.

#### Musicology

Music is an inseparable part of Baul culture. While many cultures have musical elements as a part of their rituals, in Baul culture the music and philosophy are intertwined. Music also changes from culture to culture and village to village. According to folk musician/writer, David Courtney, the same art form can change in neighbouring villages in small but noticeable ways. This is an aspect that we as researchers will have to keep in mind when in the field. Can we find observable differences in Baul music depending on the region in which it is being performed?

Changes or differences in music may signify something deeper when examined. It may tell you how it spread or what elements of the philosophy were deemed more important during its spread. It is thus important for researchers to understand the basics of music- particularly folk music- itself, as Baul music draws influences from Bengali Folk music.

In *Emergence of Ethnomusicology: As Traced in Indian Perspectives*, Baisakhi Goswami examines the study of ethnomusicology in India. Ethnomusicology can be described as the holistic and cultural study of music existing in various cultural societies in the context of the study of world music cultures. Ethnomusicology views music from a social and cultural lens. A term coined by Jaap Kunst, a Dutch musicologist, Ethnomusicology developed when Western Musicologists decided to study non-Western Music in the form of oral traditions and tribal communities. This concept slowly evolved from “the study of

primitive music” to “music from any non-western culture” to the study of “traditional music and musical instruments of all cultural strata of mankind “.

In the modern scenario, ethnomusicology involves the transcription and critical analysis of songs with reference to its composition as the result of the evolution of cultural, social and anthropological aspects influencing the music, the product and the producers (Goswami).

The author puts down 4 major aspects of music that should be analyzed. These include the performers and participants, the activities and actions, musical instruments as well as tonal and textual interpretation. With reference to music as a part of a culture, aspects such as the performance, its occasions and the values, intercultural influences and the change of musical traditions historically should also be studied. The author stresses on the importance of field surveys in musicology, as only then can critical statements come out from the musical activities observed (Goswami).

With reference to the Indian context, differences between Western and Indian cultures led to the exchange of ideas between both cultures. The study of music with reference to culture led to observation through an ethnomusicological lens. This began with the translation of Indian folk songs, which led to an exchange of ideas between the cultures. Before independence, scholars felt that Indian folk music was unique as it had no rules regarding the construction of its text and tunes. This was because the method of analysis failed to attend to the compositional rules of indigenous text and melody. (Goswami).

An important point made by the author is that Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian scholar to ethnographically study music prior to India’s independence. This is important with reference to our research on the Bauls, as Tagore was instrumental in the evolution of Baul culture (Goswami).

Post-Independence, Indian ethnomusicological studies spread to the realms of folklore, social sciences, history, communication and gender studies. The study of Indian ethnomusicology can be broadly classified into professional and academic aspects. The professional aspect of study includes Musicians, cinematographers and performers who deal with ethnomusicological elements to earn their livelihood. The academic aspect of study

involves the deciphering of the historic, scientific and evolutionary facets of music with the aim of making it accessible to the public. This aspect of study has been spearheaded by colleges, universities, NGOs and the government (Goswami).

This article is important with regard to our research as it puts down the history and methods of ethnomusicology with reference to India. As our study revolves around Baul music, which heavily propagates its philosophy, it would be best for us to follow the academic aspect of study stated in the paper (Goswami).

Another article discusses the different methodologies of musicology. These methodologies are the scientific historical method, the analytical method and the critical or interpretive method. The scientific historical method uses Western classical music as a base, and attempts to identify relationships between music and the historical period it was from. As this study starts with the first recorded historical data, iconography, organology, notation and archival research need to be taken into consideration. The scientific historical method also makes use of the “musical canon” – “musical works that are regarded to have exceptional aesthetic value, leading to the building of a historical narrative through musical work” (‘Science’).

The analytical method of musicology breaks the music down into the form of a noted music score or sound in performance, and tries to identify it based on its form, detail etc. This method aims at understanding what makes “music” music. This method strays away from ethnomusicology as it does not look at it from a cultural context, however it helps compare the works of similar genres or composers (‘Science’).

The critical method of musicology is the most relevant and important while studying the Baul culture, as it views music from various contexts- be it historical, political, cultural and aesthetic. This methodology will let us look at Baul music through various contexts. The critical method of musicology can be summarized through the words of Kerman, who felt that “all modes of knowledge, including the theoretical and the analytical, the historical and the intuitive, help achieve a critical response to a piece of music” (‘Science’).

The main problem with musicological research is the question of whether one should conduct their research from a contextual, or critical perspective, or a purely aesthetic

perspective- taking into consideration only compositional aspects of the music. With respect to our research, it would be best to study Baul music from a critical perspective, as it is a multi-faceted culture. The aspects studied would be the philosophy, origin, musical content of Baul music. These aspects could be compared to the apparent change in Baul music in the light of recent commercialization. This would allow us to view it from different angles, to give us different perspectives to the music, instead of looking at it as only a performance based art, eventually acting as a lens for us to explore Baul culture.

## **History of Baul Music**

As of 2016, it has been over 126 years since the time of Sage Fakir Lalon Shah (circa 1174-1890). Of the 116 years of his life, he is believed to have spent 75 years dedicated to composing Baul music and these works are what are used as reference points. Although the fakir played a large role in the development of the music, culture and philosophy, it has been established that the Bauls as a community came about before his time (Haque). Lalon Fakir Shah is a figure who is repeatedly referenced in texts concerning the Bauls. The importance of Lalon Fakir Shah in Baul music is an aspect that can be looked at on field. As Lalon Fakir was one of the seminal figures in Baul music, we could look at whether his standing as a figure has changed in the face of the commercialization of the genre.

Although initially, the term “Baul” which originated in Bengali text in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was used in reference to the musical genre, it evolved to incorporate other existing musical genres like *Moromi Gaan* or “mystical music” including the *Murshidi*, *Marefoti*, *Boyati*, *Jari and Shari*. All of these forms are popularly recognised by the common masses. In spite of the Baul culture incorporating these different forms of music within itself, it individually marked a landmark in the indigenous heritage of Bangladesh. The Baul culture in its entirety – philosophy, spiritual essence, music, social traditions and practices and their close interactions with nature – forms a part of their music’s lyrical content (Haque). Haque’s comment on *Moromi Gaan* could be an aspect we could study on field, as he talks about the incorporation of other existing musical genres into the broad framework of Baul *Gaan*.

According to Shamik Bag, after Baul singer Paban Das Baul collaborated with Sam Mills in 1997, the Baul community, through him, was suddenly greeted in a way that was absolutely new. Paban Das being signed by Peter Gabriel and Real World Records gave the

society of Kolkata a new perspective on the alternative society practiced by the Bauls. Das's partner, Mimlu Sen, believes that the music collaboration was accepted by society largely because of its following of the Western community. The globalization of Baul music is one aspect we can focus on as a part of our research, as its spread could have affected the musical style itself. Bag's article gave us insight into how the spread of Baul music to an international forum changed its position in the urban society (Bag, "Music of the Sky").

One particular book takes a look at the evolution of perspectives on the Bauls. It considers the outsider's perspective to this unique culture. "Seeking Bauls of Bengal" by Jeanne Openshaw, considers the Bauls from a historical point of view. Where and how did they originate? How did they influence society? What was happening to the political and religious structures of the time? The author of this book conducted extensive primary research in Rarh and Bagri. Our study is based in Bolpur and Shantiniketan. An aspect to be analyzed could be musical differences between regions. This book is a good example of how research into the history and origin of a culture sheds light about recent developments in the culture.

Baul music contains references to its culture's unique philosophy of life and their esoteric beliefs are often explained through their songs. Their music is the central feature of their lives. Because of their non-traditional beliefs and practices, until recently, the Bauls were not an accepted part of mainstream society. They were marginalised and gained prominence only after their spread. Mystic Music, a photo journey by Harikrishna Katragadda covers the annual festival at Joydev Kenduli. The Bauls themselves have written down their musings on life and have been subject to documentaries made by outsiders, especially during the annual Baul festival at Joydev Kenduli (Katragadda and Mukherjee). This could have led to a rise of Baul art to an international platform.

Their gradual entrance into Bollywood and international Western stages brought a new lease to their music and culture. This article not only speaks extensively about their music but also gives us a previously unheard categorization of the community into two – yogis and performers (Katragadda and Mukherjee). The article also speaks of the possible influence of the Krishna consciousness movement, or Vaishnavite movement on the Baul community. This source gave us a brief but important insight about the role of music in propagating their ideology- that Bauls use their music to to propagate a casteless, creedless

society practicing religious tolerance. Apart from the contribution of this article to our secondary research, it also provided us with names of a number of lesser known Baul performers who could be contacted for interviews during on-field research like Gour Khepa Devdas, Biswanath Das Baul, Kartik Das Baul, Kanhai Das baul, Sanatan Das Baul, Lakhan Das Baul and Paban Das Baul.

## Music

In "Origin and Construction of the Melodies in Baul Songs of Bengal", Josef Kuckertz examines the construction of Baul songs. In India, scholars have managed to make observations and gather information by studying the Baul texts and songs and have been successful in creating a picture of the life and human-religious ideas of the Baul singers. A majority of the Bauls are either Hindus or Muslims and are from village labouring classes. In recent times, Bauls have even become property owners and some choose to have fixed places of residence while other Bauls believe in wandering from one place to another. Kuckertz says that the Baul is indeed madly in love with the Divine Self and the word Baul does indeed denote 'mad' or 'crazy'. It is the Ultimate Reality of life that the Bauls try to narrate through their poetry. By making allusions to common objects, the simple language and the use of simple instruments in the absence of any artistic rules, the Bauls have made sure their poetry is easy enough for anyone to comprehend (Kuckertz). A study of the unique use of metaphors and parables in Baul music could shed light on its lyricism and philosophy.

The Bauls constantly announce their pain and joy and their efforts and sorrows through their songs and poems. Another important theme that is seen throughout their poetry is the theme of love. They also pay close attention to the body, which as a microcosm they relate to the macrocosm of the universe. The irregular external life of a Baul is in fact a result of the continual attention to all the processes in their mind and body. Kuckertz believes that a Baul is ever ready to put his thoughts and feelings into poetical expressions and play effortless melodies to accompany them (Kuckertz). Thus, a Baul will always be seen with an instrument in hand, whether an *Ektara* as mostly seen in the Western parts such as Bankura and Birbhum or a *Dotara* and *Sarinda* as popularly seen in the northern districts of Dinajpur and Malda. As we plan on visiting the Birbhum district of Bengal, this is another aspect of Baul music to focus on- regional differences in music.



2.1.A fakir tuning his *Dotara*

Kuckertz goes on to talk about the different instruments used in Baul music. He talks about how they are also seen carrying a Dugi- a kettle drum they tie to their waists. He also mentions their performances- where they can be seen performing before large audiences at annual fairs etc. He mentions that a group of Bauls seen at a fair will usually consist of a singer-soloist, one or two string instrument players and a few percussionists. This group creates its distinct sound by jingling small bells and playing the Gubgubi, which is the plucked drum and it makes an unfamiliar sound that stands out when the singer pauses (Kuckertz).

This article goes on to analyse some of the Baul songs and the author even compares some of the Baul songs to folk songs of the established communities of Bengali villages. Under the analysis of some of the Baul songs, the area where it was performed, the Baul singers involved and the transcriptions for each line are studied extensively. The style of their performance and their references to religion in their music are also factors that are examined by the author before coming to the conclusion that Baul music is the ‘...true folk music of Bengal’. He attributes this to the fact that it is an amalgamation of different folk music genres, and also because of its prominence in rural Bengal (Kuckertz). As Kuckertz talks about the composition of the music, he provides a lot of reference points that can be used on field.

Another article by Bag discusses the annual festival at Joydev Kenduli. He describes the role of performers and audiences and their involvement in the performances in a detailed manner. From a musicological perspective, this article discusses the performer and the audience. He differentiates between *kirtan* performances and Baul performances, where the *kirtan* is a lot more mainstream and draws more crowds, whereas, Baul music draws more select crowds. An important point is made in the article where the author states that there are more *kirtan* performances than Baul performances at the annual mela. This raises the question of commercialization. The author also talks about the relationship Baul performers share with the audience, and the importance of music in providing this link (Bag, “When the Minstrels Meet”). The big festival at Joydev Kenduli is held in the month of January annually. Since we will be missing the famous festival when we go on-field, this article gave us a fair idea of what Baul performances are like and in addition, gave us some perspective on what kind of questions can be asked on-field.

### **The Spread of Baul Music**

Baul music, apart from being associated with Bengal for its raw essence in poetry is also known for its storytelling nature. These aspects of the music have made it nationally and internationally famous. According to famous Baul performer Lakhan Das Baul, fusions of Baul music with relatively newer forms of music have made it more appealing on a universal level. Being an international performer himself, he claims that although the intermingling of Baul music with others is what has made it popular now, it has not lost its original spirit. He is a fourth generation Baul from Bolpur in West Bengal and has taken to spreading the message of his music abroad (Ganguly). Since our research is focusing primarily on the music of the Bauls and its evolution, it will be interesting to see if what he has said about the original essence of the music being constant is verifiable and true. This can probably be done on field through interviews and questionnaires. The simple observation of their habits could also check whether they still hold the original essence of their music.

Ganguly also believes that the themes that Baul music is centred around appeal largely to the local people rather than the international crowd. What draws audiences from around the world are the subtle messages on self-discovery and the meaning of life that are interspersed in these themes.



A famous personality who has taken Baul music outside of its roots in Bengal is Rabindranath Tagore. Other sources also tell us the influence of Baul music on his poetry and work. The task of spreading this unique music abroad has now been undertaken by the Bauls themselves. An apt example of this would be Lakhan Das Baul who has performed fusion performances in Columbia and New Zealand. Other Bauls who have performed on international platforms include Karthik Das Baul, Raju Das Baul and of course, Parvathy Baul (Ganguly).

Apart from the spread to an international platform, Baul music has gained popularity even within the nation, where it is now being performed in major cities during music festivals by young fusion bands who adopt musical elements characteristic of the Bauls. These bands fuse Baul music with other genres like blues and world music. This could imply that Baul music strikes the chord with the youth, who take influences and meld it with contemporary genres. The Bauls are concentrated in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, an area we are focussing on during our time in the field (Ganguly). An interesting point that comes up with the spread of Baul music is the change in its core ideology. Lakhan Das Baul felt that the globalization of Baul music and its mainstream success was diluting the essence of Baul music. At the same time, he felt that this was strengthening the connection between the audience and Bauls. There are some people who are attracted to the Baul way of life. But it is a journey and a process. Emotions and essence of life has remained the same over the years, as have the stories. But there are modern adaptations that make it relevant today. The universal message of love in Baul music draws people looking for relief from life's troubles (Ganguly).

Another opinion piece, however, almost directly speaks to our research question. This piece titled, *Contemporary Bauls Drawn to Fame and Materialism or In Sync with Their Roots?*, was published on indiaopines.com. The author raises some interesting questions on whether the Bauls have remained faithful to their core ideologies despite the increasing popularity of Baul music. Although it is an opinion piece where the author prefers to be anonymous, the points raised are worth giving further consideration.

Uttam Das Baul, a Baul singer, believes that more Bauls are being incorporated into mainstream culture, implying that Baul culture is increasing in popularity. The only way

Bauls are able to earn a living is by singing professionally for events (Ghatak). The effect of globalization on Baul music could thus change the lifestyle Bauls were best known for.

One of the major aspects of Baul philosophy is the concept of self and this author explores how this 'self' is affected by or manages to remain unaffected by materialism through the changing times. This issue becomes particularly pertinent when it comes to the globalisation of Baul music. The author uses a number of quotes and examples of popular Bauls and Baul researchers in order to provide a verifiable basis for his opinions. He says that Baul bands are playing an important role by bringing mainstream culture closer to the heterodoxy of the Bauls. The author believes that most contemporary Bauls are moving towards a more commercial form of music because it is almost impossible for Bauls to sustain themselves by living a *madhukari* life, where they live by begging for arms. However, the author ends the article by stating that that modern day Bauls are flexible, meaning that they still follow their *sahajiya* path, even while playing commercial concerts. While we might not be able to use this article as a source of information while writing our report, it does raise many questions related to our topic and gives us another aspect to keep in mind during our research (Ghatak).

## **Ideology and Philosophy**

Baul culture developed as somewhat of an antithesis to the prevailing religions of the time that it came to be. Thus, Bauls are often seen as mystics who break otherwise orthodox traditions through their *sahajiya* path. However, to the Baul, his or her lifestyle is an idealized one. The Bauls are carefree philosophers whose songs are not only meaningful but also influence society. Lisa Knight, in her paper- 'Bauls in Conversation' Cultivating Oppositional Ideology'-mentions how Bauls view their songs not only as beautiful but also as platforms for social change. This is an aspect that has in recent years caught the attention of the government as well. Considering that our research is regarding Baul music, we believe that this is an interesting aspect of study as music is influenced by the philosophy and ideologies of its culture. With this in mind, questions like "Has changes in Baul culture affected Baul music?" can be answered (Knight).

Bauls not only convey their ideology, through songs, but also through conversations of song. Being an anthropologist, Knight, turns her attention simply to the Bauls in

conversation. As she states, "My objective with this article is to give a contemporary example of how Bauls disseminate, apply and work through their ideology as they converse with others." In this way, the author hopes to find another angle through which Baul songs and philosophy can be understood. The Bauls are also known to be vivid storytellers. Considering that most of our primary research will involve interviews with Bauls, this paper gives us a different perspective from which to view the ideologies of the Bauls with reference to their music.

In "Baul Philosophy", Selina Thielemann explains how Baul culture is not just about music, but how music is a medium through which Bauls propagate and practice their philosophy with the aim of attaining *Sadhana*. The author also elaborates upon how the Baul tradition has absorbed the positive essence of different Indian tantric philosophies, and how Baul *darsana* or *sadhana* has evolved since its inception. She believes that the crux of Baul philosophy is centred around the most basic philosophical question- "Who am I?" This is an aspect to focus on, as commercialization could have changed tenants of Baul philosophy. She says that music is an important *darsana* because it wards away negative vibrations, and is awakened through the power of human consciousness. The singing of songs related to god brings them closer to attaining *Sadhana*. As we are studying the evolution in Baul music, the author provides important links between Baul music and Baul philosophy (Thielemann).

The Popular Expression of Religious Syncretism: The Bauls of Bengal as Apostles of Brotherhood by Charles Capwell traces the origins of the Bauls back to the *Siddhacaryas*-saints of Buddhist and Vaishnava origins. *Charyapadas*, the tantric poems of the *Siddhacaryas* are said to be the earliest record of Bengali tongue. These poems are said to have tantric origins. Capwell also mentions the impact of Islam on Baul philosophy.

The article ends by talking about Lalon Fakir and his role in Baul culture and history. Musical frameworks put forward by Bauls like Lalon Fakir were changed by Bauls like Syam Sundor Das Baul, which brought freely evolving structures involving odd time signatures and conventional interpolations. The conclusion of the article is apt, as it talks about how Bauls still function as apostles of brotherhood in order to fight against sectarian beliefs. However, this article was written in 1988, so the very essence of Baul culture could have changed in the years of transition (Capwell 1988). This aspect of Baul culture could also be checked on field, as some scholars believe that Baul culture is deteriorating.

In another article, Charles Capwell talks about how Baul philosophy revolves around reaching enlightenment through the reverse path, and how Bauls use coitus not for satisfying desires, but for transcending to another plane- or meeting the ‘man of my heart’. He also draws upon similarities between Baul and Vedic, Upanishadic, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and Vaishnava cultures. Capwell believes that interpretations of Baul songs that do not attempt to understand the esoteric and exoteric meanings are incomplete, as Baul philosophy plays an important part in the music (Capwell, 1974).

The Baul need for enlightenment is present in every song. Even mundane songs devoid of any concern have underlying tones.

*“O  
my mind-boatman, my  
friend,  
let us  
countrymen return to our countryland.  
I left  
home, and I  
came to a  
foreign land;  
I have  
no friends in  
this country.  
I came  
to row my  
boat of desires;  
I'm worn  
out with rowing.  
I've made  
an account of  
my receipts and  
expenditures  
and see*

*nothing in the  
balance.*

*Docile Sarat  
says, "I didn't  
take care of  
the boat I  
rowed.*

*It has  
gotten salt-rot.*

*In this  
country there are no repairmen  
at all."*

Even though this song might not have any spiritual overtones, Capwell interprets the line “I didn’t take care of the boat I rowed” as meaning that the Baul did not take care of his or her body, and thus did not do proper sadhana. This ability to find spiritual meaning in everything has given Bauls the reputation of being “*ulto pathiks*”, or followers of the reverse order of things. Through the use of both of Capwell’s articles, we gained a better understanding of the two main facets of Baul philosophy- Yoga and music (Capwell, 1974).

On the whole, our literature review provides a base for our on-field research, by looking at musicology with respect to India, the history and origins of the Bauls, Baul music and its philosophy. A major limitation of a lot of the reviewed literature is that most of it was published before Baul music rose to prominence in the international music scene. As we are looking at the evolution of music, the literature gives us a blueprint of what Baul music was at the time it was studied. As a culture changes over time, Baul culture could have also undergone changes which could have changed the form and expression of the community as a whole. This provides us the opportunity to juxtapose our findings on field to older data collected by researchers.

## Chapter 3

### FINDINGS AND ON-FIELD EXPERIENCE

Before our trip to West Bengal, the group watched performances of Baul musicians online. Needless to say, the actual atmosphere experienced by attending a live Baul performance was lacking. Much of our knowledge of the Bauls up to this point had been through our secondary and literary sources, none of which could capture the essence of the music itself. We had spoken to few people associated with the Bauls when we were looking for sources and methods through which to interview the Bauls.

On our first day in Calcutta, we met Professor Anubrato Ghatak, a professional in Western Classical Music. We interviewed him extensively for over a couple of hours and during the interview, covered a number of themes including the origin of the Baul community and their music. He briefed us about his personal experience with a few Bauls and then began telling us about the Bauls and their evolution to who they are today. He said that in Bengal, it is a generally held notion that the Bauls, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had started forming an alternative society. They formed a society which was based on equality and finding the right path to self- exploration and discovery. He also said that one needs to stay in Baul *shongo* i.e. in the presence of Bauls. He emphasized on the fact that it is a way of life and not only the music they sing and follow but the passion and reason for singing and creating a whole new tiny world. Professor Ghatak also recreated the musical aspect of Baul songs along with a few Baul instruments and afterwards, a few modern instruments. According to him, the new Baul songs are a bit absurd but the main frame is the same. He said that the fusions which can be seen are good in that sense that they text the originality of Baul *gaan*. He also demonstrated the use of various Baul instruments such as the *dotara* and *khomok*.



3.1. Professor Anubrato Ghatak

According to our itinerary, the whole of the next day, the 5<sup>th</sup> was to be spent at the Manush Mela in Baishnoghata, Patuli. Here, we expected to interview several Bauls from West Bengal and Bangladesh. We had also been told that we would be able to meet Bauls who had performed around the world as well. In addition to this, we hoped to make contacts who could further help us with our research.

We reached the Mela at around 5pm. The first thing that struck us was the loud music emanating from the stage. Looking around, we saw scores of people crowded in front of a well-lit stage. There were food stalls lined up on the right and stalls selling different handicrafts on the left.



3.2. Manush Mela

The performances had not begun yet and we could see the preparations being made on-stage. We soon found Mr. Saikat Sarkar, the person we had been corresponding with from Pune. He introduced us to his colleague Mr. Subhadeep Das who gave us permission to do whatever we needed to for our research. However, as we started walking around, observing our surroundings, we realised we were met with apprehensive and wary looks. When we tried to enter the *akhara*, we were stopped by security and it was only after we found Ms. Moupiya Banerjee and brought her to explain the situation that we were allowed to enter. When we entered the *akhara*, we were treated warily by the Bauls who were preparing for their performances. We gathered this was because we were a fairly large group of twelve people, all looking equally curious and out-of-place.

As we were setting up outside one of the *akharas*, we met a Baul on his way to the stage to perform. Ms. Joyee Roy introduced us to him and on learning of our research, he agreed to talk to us for a few minutes before going up on stage. We learned that he was Lakhan Das Baul, a very famous and renowned Baul singer who lived in Shantiniketan. He was the first Baul we interviewed on field. Lakhan Das Baul laid emphasis on importance of finding *moner manush* through their singing. He said that Bauls are artists of all kinds. They sing and dance and they paint as well but in their hearts after entering that trance-like state of mind. Lakhan Das Baul has performed in many countries globally, from Columbia to New Zealand and has been part of fusion versions of Baul songs. However, he was testimony to the fact that not all modern Bauls have forgotten the essence of the movement. These days, there are many people simply dressing as Bauls but not really learning or practicing being a Baul. But he mentioned that regardless of whether a Baul is true or material, the path of the Baul is one of non-discrimination with no exceptions. According to Lakhan, the best part about singing Baul songs is finding an eternal, personal link with god. But he hoped that the public in general do not forget the spirituality inherent in the music, and also felt that through fusion music, a wider audience could be reached and further teachings could be spread.





3.3. Lakhan Das Baul

We then went to watch Lakhan Das perform on stage. We were all mesmerised. Nothing we had read or seen during our primary research and nothing we had been told about Baul performances had prepared us for that moment. We were enraptured by the performance- the resounding beats and the energetic movements by the Bauls on stage. Looking around, we saw other members of the audience get involved by clapping or stomping on the ground in time with the music. When the performance ended, we decided we would interview a few Bauls in the *akharas*.



3.4. Baul Performance at the Manush Mela

We were allowed to enter the *akhara* immediately this time, with no hassles. We were shown to a Baul sitting to our left. We instantly recognized him as Karthik Das Baul from the pictures of Bauls we had seen during our secondary research. He was the first Baul to talk to us about the difference between Bauls who performed in villages and those who performed commercially. He himself was an international performer and was quite self-critical. He believed that Bauls originally did not need to perform abroad to sustain themselves. According to him, it was a want for material wealth and more comfortable lifestyles that lead Bauls to start performing commercially. While he was critical of this shift of Baul musicians, he also expressed that he understood the reasons behind their shift and so did not think it was wrong.



3.5. Karthik Das Baul

After watching many more Baul performances throughout the evening, we finally decided to leave. Right before we left, we met Durga Khepi, the only female Baul we interviewed for the entirety of our journey. She is the wife of Gurur Khepa, another Baul. She claimed that there were many famous women Bauls and women have been singing since the inception of this form but it was just that they have not been recognized for their work. She said that Baul is a philosophy with a culture that has only two pages: *sadhika* i.e., the female and *sadhak* i.e., the male. She said that no one could survive without believing in god and all

gods are one. She said that she believed that Krishna is the creator of the universe and Shiva is the caretaker of the Universe. She also said that she prayed and believed in Krishna as the most supreme. At the end of this interview, we decided to leave the mela for the day and made plans to return the following day.



3.6. Durga Khepi

We had been told by Mr. Anubrato Ghatak about another mela happening near the Manush Mela. The group proceeded to the Baishnabghata Mela to interview academicians who had knowledge in the field of our research. The two people we interviewed there were Mr. Arun Kumar Chakravarty and Mr. Subhendu Maity. Mr. Arun Kumar is a renowned Sufi poet and scholar. He spoke about the Baul community as a kind of cult. He also said that the human body contained everything that was present in the Universe. What was not present in the Universe could not be seen in the body.



3.7. Mr. Arun Chakravarty

Mr. Subhendu Maity is a Bengali folk music performer and scholar, who has been in the music business for the past 50 years. In his interview, he spoke to us about the history of the Bauls and where the historical roots of their ideologies lie. According to him the Baul philosophy is an amalgamation of three main religions: Sahajayana Buddhism, Sufism, and Vaishnavism, all of which were brought to the Indian subcontinent through various conquests. He also tried to explain the philosophies of a Baul mainly the concept of “Moner manush” – and how it entails an endless search within oneself.



3.8. Mr. Subhendu Maity

The next day, a few of us, along with our mentor went back to the Manush Mela. This time, the people we encountered were less wary and more open to helping us. After much observation and discussion, we realised that this was because we were a smaller group than before. And people were not as wary of us especially since we had been continuously introduced to other people such as Mr. Sushobhan Adhikari, a curator at the Shantiniketan Archival Library. He is an expert on the works of Rabindranath Tagore and emphasized on the fact that Tagore himself was a Baul. He not only had tremendous respect for Bauls but also spread their teachings through his work. He said that the only difference between a Baul and him was the fact that instead of singing and dancing, he used painting and writing to express himself. He offered to give us access to the archives in Shantiniketan.



3.9. Mr. Sushobhan Adhikari

On the second day, as soon as we reached the Mela, we went to the *akhara* immediately because none of the performances had started yet. We met and interviewed Goutam Das Baul whose views on the philosophy of the Bauls were similar to those of other Bauls we had interviewed so far. One way he differed from them was that he accepted the manner in which today, modern generation Bauls had other occupations. According to him, it was perfectly fine as they could not earn enough from the *madhukari* way of life and hence, needed other occupations for survival. Initially, the earnings from *bhiksha* would suffice as they stayed in ashrams but now, this method did not work due to the tremendous inflation and

price hikes. He also told us that the number of female Bauls or Baulinis had reduced in number over the years.



3.10. Goutam Das Baul

We also interviewed Nimai Goswami on the same day. Although he did not have the same surname as the others we had interviewed so far, he shared the same ideologies and philosophy as the others. He believed that being a Baul is not only about the music or appearance but more importantly is about having a Baul-like thought process and ideology, being a Baul is a way of life. He told us about how all Bauls seek a divine connection with God. He was one of the only Bauls to talk to us about the aid given to them by the government. This aspect will be covered later in this report.



3.11. Nimai Goswami

Before leaving the Manush Mela, we also interviewed the organiser, Mr. Saikat Sarkar. He said that Baul *gaan* is a religion and the songs are the 'mantras' of the religion and are simply a medium to express one's thoughts. Mr. Sarkar also said that Baul *totto* i.e. Baul philosophy is the amalgamation of Sufisim, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Tantrism. He also claimed that the Baul philosophy said that there are only two religions that exist: male and female. This was linked to the basic structure that was followed in the animal kingdom. We concluded our interview with him after thanking him for all his support and help.



3.12. Saikat Sarkar

On the evening of the third day, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the entire group left to Shantiniketan to spend the next five days there. The next morning, we went to our first interview- Raju Das Baul. On reaching there, we were pleasantly surprised to also be introduced to Basu Deb Das Baul who also agreed to be interviewed by us. Basu Deb Das Baul began the interview with a song. He was accompanied by Raju Das Baul and two of his acquaintances. Sitting in a traditional *akhara*, we were entranced by the music. The language barrier fell off completely. We understood nothing of the words but somehow, in the most clichéd of senses, we understood the essence of the song. After the performance of a few more songs, we interviewed Basu Deb Das Baul. He said Bauls are *sarvatyagi* i.e. one who sacrifices everything and *sarvabhogi* i.e. one who is non - materialistic. Bauls follow a simple way of life and all the complicated and complex existential issues are seen in the most simplified way. He said that the *sohojiya poth* i.e. the simple way of life is being able to control the 6 main desires of man: *kam* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moha* (temptation), *mada* (pride) and *matsarya* (envy). Bauls are able to gain mastery over the 6 *Arishadvarga*- the six vices. He also said that what every Baul aimed to do was spread the message that one must follow the right path, and in this way recognize themselves and others.



3.13. Basu Deb Das Baul and Raju Das Baul (from the left respectively)

We then followed with an interview of Raju Das Baul. He was the youngest Baul we interviewed. He spoke to us extensively about his experiences performing abroad, around the world. He laid emphasis on the point that performing abroad, commercially, did not change the true essence of Baul music. He explained that although there were many fusions done



with Baul music, even in mainstream cinema, the message that Bauls were trying to spread- the love and compassion for each and every living thing- was a message that remained constant through each performance. After we concluded the interview with Raju Das Baul, we left to go back to our hotel. We were invited to be a part of the weekly performances that were held in his house. On our way back to the hotel, we bought *ektaras* and local handicrafts.

The next morning, we set off to Tarapeeth, a village near Shantiniketan. We had planned an interview with Kanhai Das Baul, an eighty year old, blind Baul. It was an experience that astounded us and we were honoured. This interview in particular impacted each member of the group. We were amazed by the man seated before us and we could sense the knowledge that he had. He gave us information about the changes in the Baul culture and in the Bauls themselves. From him we learned that there are two kinds of Bauls- *Peshadari* Bauls, who have commercial interests, and *Sadhak* Bauls who are simple Bauls. According to Kanhai, *Sadhak* Bauls are the true Bauls. He placed emphasis on obeying and listening to the Guru, learning from and loving him, and through this rising above all materialism. He also told us how you can tell the difference during a performance- by feeling it. The performances done by *Sadhak* Bauls with the intention of Bhakti and spiritual progress through music will have an entirely different feel.



3.14. Kanhai Das Baul

His home in Tarapeeth was in a winding lane, a small and basic typical village house. We met him sitting on a cot in his porch, wearing ragged and stained clothes- on first glance,

it seemed to be a scene of abject poverty. But one of the first things he said to us was “Looking at me, what you see a poor, blind man living in filth- but what you don’t see is the reservoir of spiritual knowledge and experience within. The material world can never be trusted as a depiction of truth.”

The following day, we journeyed to Joydeb Kenduli, another village close to Shantiniketan. Here, we met the eccentric Sanatan Das Baul, a person we had already met once at the Manush Mela. To us, he represented the essence of what we had been studying about the Bauls so far. He was vague in his answers and almost all our questions were evaded. He would suddenly break into song when he was asked questions that he did not want to answer.



3.15. Sanatan Das Baul

Our last day in Shantiniketan was spent interviewing Deb Das Baul, father of Goutam Das Baul and guru of Karthik Das Baul. His ideals and philosophy were similar to those of Kanhai Das Baul. He said that when a Baul sings he/she sings with his/her whole body and soul. He said that they sing for different audiences in different ways. Deb Das Baul specified that Bauls do not believe in gods or goddesses and only believe in Krishna. Gods and Goddesses are Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Shiva, Durga, etc whereas Krishna is the highest power to have taken birth. Deb Das Baul says that Krishna is the god of love and compassion

and which used in a metaphysical way. In the Baul culture, Krishna is seen as the embodiment of lust and Radha as the embodiment of love. It is an interplay between the two and when a song is sung on them, it is a dance between love and lust.



3.16. Deb Das Baul

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P.2. Anubrato Ghatak demonstrates the basics of a *dotara*



P.3. The process of making an *ektara*- Shantiniketan



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P.5. Our first Baul interview- Lakhon Das Baul



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P.8. A Baul (left) and a Fakir (right) in an *akhara*



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P.11. Interview with Basu Deb Das Baul (left) and Raju Das Baul (right)



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P.13. Meeting Sanatan Das Baul in Joydev Kenduli



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P.18. Interview with Kanhai Das Baul



## Chapter 4

### ORIGINS AND HISTORY

When it comes to studying the Baul culture, be it through books or interviews, a lot has been said about the great Baul, Lalon Fakir Shah, who spent more than 75 of his 116 years composing and shaping Baul music and philosophy. It has been 126 years since the time of Lalon Fakir Shah (circa 1774-1890) (Haque). As Baul music is an oral tradition, current day Bauls still sing songs composed by Lalon Fakir. However, certain scholars believe that the synthesis of Baul creed predates the time of Lalon Fakir (Haque). Basu Deb Das Baul believed that the Baul tradition was popularized by Duddu Shah Kareem and Hiroo Shah Gosain before the advent of Lalon Fakir. The exact time period of the former two masters is unknown because of the lack of documentation of the oral Baul tradition (Baul, Deb Das, Personal interview).



3.1. Artist rendition of Lalon Fakir (“In search of Lalon”)

When we were on field, Kanhai Das Baul disputed the identity of Lalon Fakir. He believed that Lalon Fakir was a Fakir and not a Baul, and that Bauls and Fakirs can be differentiated based on where they were from- West Bengal or Bangladesh respectively. This can be attributed to the fact that the way in which the philosophy and traditions can evolve is affected by the location where it occurs. Those influenced by the Hindu tradition took the last name ‘Baul’ and those influenced by the Islamic tradition, ‘Fakir’. Kanhai Das Baul also

said that Lalon was an expert on discourse on Marifat, Haqiqat, Tariqat and Sariyat-Consciousness about God's existence, the essence of reality, religious customs and its genesis (Baul, Kanhai Das, Personal interview). However, Nimai Goswami believed that Rabindranath Tagore and Subhash Chandra Bose were Bauls, as they had a similar thought process to that of Bauls. He also claimed that there was no difference between Bauls from Bengal and Bauls from Bangladesh. He further said that religion determines whether a person is a Baul or a Fakir (Goswami, Personal Interview). Although Lalon Fakir is not considered a Baul by some such as Kanhai Das Baul, his themes influenced the development of Baul philosophy and the reverse path, or *ulta-sadhan*. However, there was a general consensus amongst the Bauls that Lalon Fakir was an important Baul.

## Etymology

“About Baul Tradition” suggests that “Baul” was first used in 15th century Bengali texts- Vrindavanadas's *Chaitanya-bhagavata* and Krishnadas Kaviraj's *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. This term eventually evolved into a musical genre. However, the late Bengali scholar Shashibhusan Das Gupta suggested that “Baul” originated from the Sanskrit words *vatula* meaning insane, or from *vyakula* which means “impatiently eager”. These words go hand in hand with the aim of Baul culture- to realize one's union with their eternal lover, or *moner manush* (About Baul Tradition). On the other hand, eminent Bangladeshi musician Maqsoodul Haque believed that Baul music evolved by incorporating influences from “*Moromi Gaan*”(mystical music) like *Murshidi*, *Marefoti*, *Boyati*, *Jari*, *Shari*. On the other hand, Atis Dasgupta suggests that the term “Baul” could have originated from *awliya*, meaning friend or devotee.

The lack of documentation of the Baul culture from its conception up until recent years has led to several inconsistencies in the beliefs of the Baul. Due to the fact that the Bauls mainly had an oral tradition, many have vastly different perspectives on when and where the culture originated, how it spread, what the philosophy is and even on who is considered a Baul. However, there are several recurring themes and names, the best example of which is Lalon Fakir.

## Origin Myths

Some sources suggest that Baul culture can be traced back to the Great Vaishnavite saint Nithyananda and his son Birbhadra, or to 8th century Persian minstrels called *Ba'al*. While the true origins of the Baul culture remains vague (as previously stated), scholars have been able to identify and ascertain several elements and influences of other cultures such as Sufi Islam, Tantrism, Vaishnavism and the Sahajiya Sect of Buddhism (About Baul Tradition).

The oral tradition of Baul culture makes it hard to trace. Some of the earliest manuscript evidence of Baul songs can be traced back to the notebooks of Lalon Fakir Shah (Salomon).

In “From Akhara to Fusion - the transformation of Baul music in Bangladesh”, Haque talks about the synthesis of Vaishnavism and Sufism, and their role in creating Baul *Gaan*. The 8th century saw the rise of the Bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu, India- a spiritual revolt against the caste system. Bhakti popularized the simple expression of one’s love for god in the spirit of humanity.

In the 14th century, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his disciple Nithyananda helped spread the Bhakti movement to Bengal. This led to the synthesis of Vaishnavism- which fought against religious bigotry and discrimination, and subjugation of any kind. The epicentre of this movement was Bengal’s Nadiya District, as it was the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (Baul, Deb Das, Personal interview). This claim was further validated by Basu Deb Das Baul, who believed that *Baul gaan* was first seen in Bengal’s Birbhum district. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was one of the first known Baul singers in the Nadiya district. So while it is still uncertain which district or village was the actual birthplace of Baul music, there is a general consensus that it has its roots in Bengal.

Mahaprabhu also believed that there was a very basic difference between Bauls and Fakirs- Fakirs were from Bangladesh and the language, accents and lyrics were slightly different from Bauls but the message and central idea behind their *gaan* was the same. He also added that people coming from Islamic tradition follow fakirs while people coming from Hindu tradition follow Bauls (Baul, Deb Das, Personal interview).



This social revolution converged with the Sufi movement of Islam, which was also slowly becoming popular with the masses. The Sufi movement rose to prominence with the rise of orthodox Islam in the 14th century. This orthodoxy was challenged by Sufi Fakirs from Persia, Turkey, Yemen & Iraq. Both these movements had similar beliefs- to promote non-sectarianism, secularism and importantly humanism (Haque, "The Baul Movement and Legacy of Fakir Lalon Shah").

In *The Bauls and Their Heretic Tradition*, Atis Dasgupta draws parallels between the *Sahajiyas* and the Bauls. The *Sahajiya* philosophy emerged with the creation of the Buddhist and Vaishnava *Sahajiyas*. The *ultra-sadhan*, or the reverse path was one of the pillars of the *Sahajiya* tradition. This path involves the rejection of institutional religion and its paraphernalia of ritualism and ceremony. The Dohas and Charyapadas of the *Sahajiyas* had an iconoclastic element similar to that of the Bauls. The Guru-Shishya system of the Bauls is also similar to that of the Buddhist and Vaishnavite *Sahajiyas* (Dasgupta, 73).

In "The Baul Movement and Legacy of Fakir Lalon Shah", Haque argues that the synthesis of Baul creed was because of atrocities inflicted on Buddhists by Hindu Senas and Muslim invaders. Attacks by these invaders forced Buddhists to flee to Bengal, where they took shelter with native Buddhists. The native Buddhists who wore the *Chibor* (Saffron Robe) and a shaved head discarded this lifestyle and grew out their beard and hair, and started singing hymns in praise of one god. This merged with the Sufi and Vaishnava movement, leading to the synthesis of the Baul creed. This sentiment was echoed by the Bengali scholar and curator, Subhendu Maity, who traced the origins of Baul culture back to the Buddhist era nearly 2500 years ago. An important idea propagated by the Buddhists was "*Sahajayana*"- the idea that if you could study and know your body and self, you could know the universe. They believed that the human body was a miniature form of the universe. This idea developed their conception of life and the manner in which life is to be lived. They said that '...if you could from your body understand every cell, you could learn the ways of the universe and live a beautiful life' (Maity, Personal interview).

This concept of *Sahajayana* was also addressed by Nimai Goswami, who talked about how Baul culture and philosophy delved into concepts like that of Quantum Physics and how the human body as a microcosm was a reflection of the greater macrocosm of the

universe (Goswami, Personal interview). Similarly, Sanatan Das Baul mentioned that Baul culture revolved around the body- a person with a good body could explore the universe to the maximum (Baul, Sanatan Das, Personal Interview). This seems to indicate that many Bauls held the belief that to understand the Universe, one must first understand one's own physical body. The relationship or rather link between the body and the Universe becomes a recurring theme in Baul philosophy.

A similar system of beliefs can be observed among the *Saryathi* system, which is presumed to be an influence of Baul philosophy. This system was a subset of the already existing *Sahajayana* system. Following the inception of the idea of *Sahajayana*, about 1500 years ago, Muslim fundamentalists fought against the *Saryathi* system popularized by Sufi saints. The *Saryathi* system was a subset of the same idea of *Sahajayana* and said that the human body is a miniature form of the universe. This idea and its increasing popularity led to friction between the fundamentalists and the saints. This rift in ideology led to the death of over 1 lakh Sufi saints, which forced the migration of around 300 Sufi saints around 1000 years ago. These Sufis migrated to India, which coincided with the birth of Shri Chaitanya Dev, who created the Vaishnava religion which was based on the same central idea. The similarities in the thought processes of the Sufi saints and Chaitanya Dev brought these three sects (Buddhist, Sufi saints and Vaishnavas) together and formed a single religion based on the central ideas of the relationship between the body and the universe. This amalgamation was called the Baul Culture and hence, led to the origin of the Bauls (Maity, Subhendu, Personal Interview).

Others such as Sanatan Das Baul trace Baul culture back to Tantric philosophy. He said that Bauls aimed to open the nine chakras in their body, in order to open their third eye, a concept which originated in Hindu Tantric philosophy. He said that this concept goes hand in hand with the body culture of the Bauls (Baul, Sanatan Das, Personal Interview).

Eminent Bengali Musician, Anubrato Ghatak shared a different origin myth. He said that the Baul society came about as a result of persecution of the lower classes of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. These persecuted classes came together and formed communities, which eventually evolved into villages centred around Kushtia and Nadia in unified Bengal. These lower classes fought against discrimination based on class, creed and religion through the singing of songs (Ghatak, Personal Interview) and came to be known as Bauls.

Even though there are different theories and myths regarding the origins of Baul society, the common idea was that “alternative” communities were prosecuted by the religious orthodoxy. These religions came together in Bengal, which led to the creation of Baul society- one that fought for freedom and equality of all beings, irrespective of caste, religion and gender.

## Chapter 5

### THE MUSIC OF THE BAUL CULTURE

#### Music and Philosophy

Oxford Dictionary defines music as “Vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion” (Oxforddictionaries.com). Music can be characterized by various aspects like tone, rhythm, pitch and tempo among others.

There are primarily two types of music- tonal and modal music. Tonal music involves scales developed by the European Classical style of music (Ghatak, Personal Interview). Tonal music involves the use of tonality. An article by Earlham Music College defines tonality as “a system of 12 related major and minor scales that serve as a basis for the creation of triads and seventh chords above and below a central tonic. These chords then relate to each other in progressions that define a central key”. Modal music, on the other hand is “based on the displacement of the tonic note along an arrangement of seven natural tones”. Modal music involves ‘drone’, which is based off a tonic note. Modal music has no harmony and no chords, while tonal music involves the use of chords (Legacy.earlham.edu, 2016).

Baul music is modal music and involves a mode similar to a *Raaga* or *Taal*, which in turn is made up of various minor modes. Bauls use various instruments to express his or her thoughts or feelings. Some of the instruments used include the *ektara*, the *dotara*, the *sarinda* and the kettle drum carried at the waist- the *dugi*. When Bauls come together they form groups usually characterized by one singer-soloist, one or more string instruments and percussion instruments like that of the *dugi* and *khomok* (*anandalahari*). Rhythmic metre is held by small bells and the *khomok* (Kuckertz). This was immediately observable in the performances attended by the group at the Manush and Baishnabghata melas. Bauls have a very interesting vocal technique, which is very refined and advanced. It revolves around the enunciation of words, which leads to complex vocal lines.



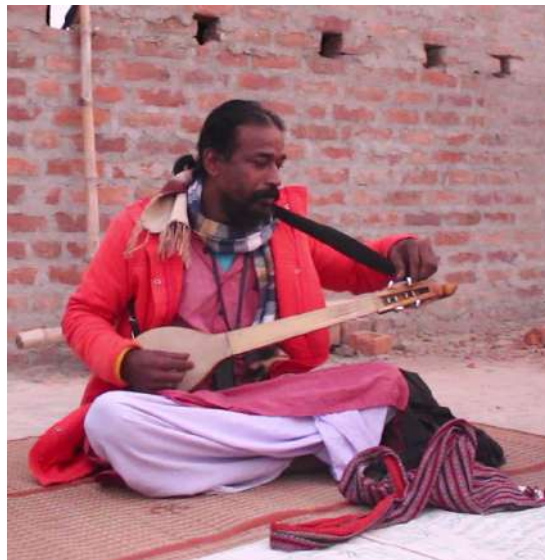
5.1. A live Baul performance at the Manush Mela

The *ektara*, a Baul instrument is a good example of drone music, as it is based off a tonic i.e. the sound. The string, or the tonic bends based on the pressure exerted by the wood. The continuous strumming of this string creates a drone which puts a person into a trance (Ghatak, Personal Interview).



5.2. Ektaras at the Manush Mela

Another important Baul instrument is the *dotara*. The *dotara* has 4-5 strings and is called so because the middle two strings are in the same tunings. The *dotara* plays an important part in Bengali music as it creates a lot of common rhythms and melodies used in Baul gaan and Bengali folk music. One of the most common rhythms made by the *dotara* is the *pran-gobindo* (Ghatak, Personal Interview).



5.3. Sanatan Das Baul tunes his *Dotara*

The *khomok*, or *anandalahari* is an instrument unique to Baul music. It plays the role of the rhythm instrument. The string is held by the user and it can be altered to change the pitch of the instrument. It is the Baul equivalent of the bass guitar in western music (Ghatak, Personal Interview).



5.4. Raju Das Baul playing the *khomok*



5.5. Professor Anubrato Ghatak explaining how a *khomok* is played

A very apt description of Baul music was given to us by Goutam Das Baul. He believed that Baul music was a synchronous vibration by which all humans excluding mentally handicapped people get attracted to by default. He said that the rendition of Baul music was like meditation- the highest form of it.

### **Baul Music and Other Folk Music**

In "Origin and Construction of the Melodies in Baul Songs of Bengal", singer Kumar Bose says, "the tunes in eastern districts of Bengal have semblances of Bhitiali of the northern region of Bhiawaiya. Those of western parts are slightly different, and usually very lengthy."

"Origin and Construction of the Melodies in Baul Songs of Bengal." by Josef Kuckertz has excerpts and analyses of songs by various Bauls. One such song by Shivram Giri uses a melodic figure and ranges between various octaves. According to the author, Giri's voice fluctuates based on the ebb and flow of the melody. Kuckertz compares this structure and style to that of Jhumur and Bhidu- folk songs native to West Bengal's Purulia district.

When asked about the difference between Folk music and Baul music, Ghatak said that Folk music from Bengal is mainly comprised of songs sung in villages. There is a mutual influence, between the Bengali folk music and Baul music. However, he said that Baul music is very different from Folk music. He said that Baul *gaan* is a religion- a religion that uses 'mantras' as a medium to express and preach teachings. (Ghatak, Personal Interview).

## Content

Baul music is simply not *gaan*, or music. It plays the very important role of imparting *gyaan*, or knowledge (Haque). In an interview, when asked whether a Baul would pick up another art form, eminent Kolkata musician Anubrato Ghatak said that it is their preferred mode of discourse- “Argument is futile. Discussion is futile. They would much rather sing a song”. Ghatak believes that as a persecuted community, Bauls could not hold philosophical discussions with the established order. The use of songs with extremely allegorical references and tunes let Bauls communicate with people from all strata of society - from the downtrodden to the upper class. The “illiterate, uneducated” people were able to immediately grasp the ideas and felt as though the song filled a spiritual void in them.

The main aim of a Baul is to meet his *moner manush*, or the “Divine Self”. This divine self is known to Bauls as “the man of the heart,” or “the man of the mind” (Kuckertz). According to Basu Deb Das Baul, messages conveyed through Baul songs deal with existential questions- Who are we? Why are we here? The songs frequently mention the search for *moner manush*, and how he can't be located in any of the three worlds- heaven, hell and earth. He can only be found within oneself.

Sanatan Das Baul said that the secret to finding *moner manush* was being humble and simple. He said that *moner manush* was someone whose thoughts are in sync with yours; a person that completes you. He also said that Bauls have a simple philosophy- they have music and love for one and all. He said that he sings for himself, and that people like his music because it is from his heart. He said that the music is a lot more than music, it is thought, and thought predates music (Baul, Sanatan Das, Personal Interview).



Durga Khepi, a female Baul believes that the Baul religion is not one without a God, on the contrary it believes that all gods are the same source, and are ultimately within you. This God within self is what *moner manush* refers to (Khepi, Durga, Personal Interview). Similarly, Anubrato Ghatak also refers to *moner manush* as the happiest version of self that exists within you. This theme of finding one's true self and god through music was stressed on repeatedly by everyone that we interviewed, which explains why the philosophy is inextricably linked to Baul music. The music and lyrics form a spiritual vehicle of sorts, allowing the musicians to unlock a deeper part of themselves. Every Baul's journey essentially is an eternal search for the best friend, expert philosopher and wise guide within himself. Through their songs, Bauls urge mankind to embark upon the same search. The solution lies within one's own body to the extent that experiencing own physicality is actually a kind of meditation. Baul songs also stress on the importance of happiness both external and internal, and they say that the more one immerses oneself in music, the happier one can be (Baul, Lakhon Das, Personal Interview). Bauls try to describe this search through their music using metaphors like that of the flower, moon, bird, treasure and other mundane objects. Even though these ideas might sound simple, only people who have spent time with Bauls understand or comprehend its true meaning (Kuckertz).

Kuckertz believes that Bauls also use their music as a medium for their daily experiences- pain, joy, sadness are a few emotions conveyed by Bauls through their songs. Bauls have an interesting understanding of the world wherein, as mentioned before, their body is nothing but a microcosm in the universe, a small part of a macrocosm governed by the doctrines of physics. This concept was very similar to a concept that was narrated to us by Nimai Goswami- who said that one's body is a miniature replica of that of the universe.

Nimai Goswami felt that Baul music succeeded as an art form because it could grab people's attention. He attributed this success to the fact that music is an outlet for feeling- a Baul can explain feelings a lot better through a song than explaining it through words. He said that it helped him find himself. He also added that this was one of the main reasons for Bauls to express themselves and convey their messages to the masses. As mentioned earlier, a large number of Bauls followed Lalon Fakir's methodology of discoursing through song and music instead of lectures.

Gurus play an important role in a Baul's journey of learning. Not only do they teach instruments and music, but they also provide a philosophical and theological framework to understand it. This helps a Baul with the content of his or her own songs. Through gurus, Bauls learn how to recognize and connect to one's true self- the inner observer that is ever present and ever still. It is from this source that all creative expression comes, and in that sense, all artists are Bauls. All the different arts are simply different forms of expression (Baul, Basu Deb Das, Personal interview). Nimai Goswami, an old Baul spoke about how gurus are on a higher spiritual level than most other Bauls. He recalled an instance where his guru- Guru Dasi Goswami did enough *pranayam* to float. Even though statements like these can be taken with a grain of salt, it is important to note the respect Bauls have for their gurus (Goswami, Personal Interview).

Our interview with Kanhai Das Baul further showed the emphasis laid by Bauls on the importance of a guru. Kanhai Das told us that he had moved to Tarapeeth after the death of his guru. His guru was cremated in the cemetery in Tarapeeth and every evening, even at his present age of 80 (at the time that this report was written), Kanhai Das Baul goes to pay his respects to his guru by singing in the cemetery. This story clearly shows how important and esteemed gurus are in the Baul culture.

Sanatan Das Baul felt that the aim of a Baul was to live a simple life, or *saarthik jeevan*. He felt that the thing that you want the most is to be simple, but it is the hardest as this simplicity can only be achieved under the mentorship of a guru. He also said that a good guru is rare to find, as it is a life of giving and being humble (Baul, Das, Sanatan, Personal Interview).

The *Akhara*, essentially a tent or *shamyana* where the Bauls would gather before a performance, played an important role in the formation of lyrical content as they functioned as informal centres for discourse. This discourse included spiritual education, metaphysics philosophy, history, ethics, mathematics, biology etc. These disciplines included complex sub disciplines like cosmology, ecology, physiology etc. *Akharas* were special institutions as it had no fixed set of gurus or sishyas, with disciples and teachers leaving out of their own free will (Haque).

An informal *Akhara* curriculum compounded by Lalon Fakir contained 4 phases, or “stations” of lyrical content- *Sthulo desh*, *Proborto desh*, *Shadhok desh* and *Shiddhi desh*. *Sthulo desh* is the first phase, which involves novice, mundane, ordinary, common phases. The second phase- *Proborto desh* is the transition phase between novice and experienced Bauls. Lyrical themes discussed in this phase can be deemed as “apprentice”. The third phase- *Shadhok desh* involves Practitioner Bauls who have perfected “the art of seeking”. The last phase- *Siddhi desh* involves Bauls who have reached self-actualization (Haque).

Sufi aspects of philosophy were covered by the “stations” of *Tri Tottyobaad*. These stations include 3 aspects of Sufi philosophy- *Noor Totty* (discourses on light, enlightenment), *Nabi Totty* (discourses on Messengers of god) and *Rasul Totty* (discourses on Prophets) (Haque). Fakirs or Sufi saints sang songs that primarily contained lyrics that drew their content from these stations.

The *Pancha Leela* station included lyrical themes along the lines of Vaishnava and Buddhist philosophy. Some of these themes include *Krishna Leela* - the story of Lord Krishna, *Goishto Leela* - music about Krishna’s life as a cowherd, *Nimai Leela* – A study of the life of Vaishnavite saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu , *Gour Leela*, which involves discussion on Gouranga and *Nitai Leela* – “discourses on the omnipotent, ‘timeless supreme” (Haque). Sanatan Das Baul also mentioned the *Pancha Leela*, but refused to talk about it, as he believed that it could only be learnt or taught by a guru (Baul, Das, Sanatan, Personal Interview). This once again reinforced the idea that those who were not directly integrated in the Baul culture as students were not privy to certain information regarding their practices and beliefs. In typical Baul fashion, these questions were skilfully evaded or deflected through vague metaphors and odd tangents that even our translators had trouble keeping up with.

There is no set rule about writing one's own songs. Most Bauls do sometimes write their own, but it seems the common practice is to sing the songs that have been handed down. Kanhai Das Baul in particular admits to initially writing his own songs, but now sings only those by Gosains. Gosains are *Sadhak* Bauls, the ones that train under *Sadhak* Gurus. Lalon Fakir's songs contain the characteristic format of many Baul songs. The alternating verse is turned into a freely evolving structure, using unpredictable repetitions and alternate phrases to emphasize the point. There is also a distinct way that the Baul songs are sung. This

difference was observed in professional singer Aroti Mukhopadyay's rendition of a song by Syam Sundor Das Baul. She sang the tune in a predictable and refined pattern, with accompanying flutes that had the finesse of a recording studio. But this refinement simply did not invoke the same kind of feeling that Syam Sundor's spontaneously crude and charming performance did. This gap shows the appeal and feel that traditional Baul songs will always have (Capwell).

An observation we made while talking to the Bauls was that language was not a big barrier when it came to music. While talking about this topic, Sanatan Das Baul remarked that language is not equivalent to feelings, and it is this feeling evoked by music that makes music universal. This feeling gives Baul music its unique appeal.

This is an interesting aspect of Baul music that was mentioned by Anubrato Ghatak as well when he had asked him what we should expect at our first live Baul performance. He said that unlike many other types of music, Baul music is powerful in the sense that it has the ability to exhaust one who is not prepared for it. The music starts low and slowly and rises in energy. Once it hits the peak it slowly begins to fall. This rise and fall, as we happened to observe, happens seamlessly so the audience is completely immersed and the rise in energy seems sudden. This immersion becomes an important in putting the audience in a trance like state, where the music envelops the senses. This was experienced first-hand by the group. This use of music can influence, regardless of whether or not the lyrics or context is understood. Perhaps this is the state of mind the Bauls speak of when they attempt to find their 'self' or *moner manush*.

By talking to Bauls and academics, we realized that Baul music was more than just music, it was a way of life. A way of life which involves rigorous training and hard work, complemented by an honest, simple style of living. Baul music on the whole, is a representation of the unorthodox lifestyle and philosophy followed by the Bauls.

## **Performance**

During our trip we visited two Baul melas- the Manush mela and the Baishnabghata mela. The Bauls style of performance during these melas can be juxtaposed to their

performances with small groups of people, which showed differences in energy, enunciation, tone and composition.

Baul performances during the mela would alternate between the same musicians, wherein the musicians who took centre stage for a song would switch with Bauls providing backing tracks. As the lead Baul switched between these performances, there was a different energy for almost every song.

The Manush Mela was a free event, which saw people from all economic classes. However, we observed that most of the audience was from the lower classes. Bauls prepared for their performances in an *akhara*, wherein they sang songs together. The *akhara* featured various kinds of Bauls, from young Bauls to their gurus and Fakirs.



5.5. Audience members of the Manush Mela

The Baishnabghata Mela on the other hand was a mela for a local community. The entry once again was free, but the audience seemed to be from a better economic background. This mela drew the interest of various Baul scholars and academics like Arun Kumar Chakraborty and Subhendu Maity.

When we conducted personal interviews with Bauls like Raju Das Baul, Basu Deb Das Baul, Sanatan Das Baul and Deb Das Baul, their style of playing was a lot more personal and interactive. This was also probably because they were playing for a smaller audience in the familiarity of their own homes.

## Chapter 6

# COMMERCIALIZATION AND ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

Bauls are known for their *madhukari* way of life. They wander from place to place singing and informing people of their philosophies. They survive off the meagre earnings from *bhiksha* (begging) or singing. Bauls who follow the *madhukari* way of life are known as *sadhak* Bauls. *Peshadari* Bauls are those who have shifted slightly away from the main ideology of the Bauls. They perform commercially and to large audiences with the purpose of earning money.

With advent of this very global economy, many changes have been seen in their performance, culture, music and way of life. Traits of greed and desire can be seen quite prominently in the new generation *peshadari* Bauls (Baul, Kanhai Das, Personal Interview). Nimai Goswami and Deb Das Baul also talked about *peshadari* Bauls, who were singer-songwriters who played Baul music for the money it brought them. Their main aim through their performances was still to spread the message of love and brotherhood and although they performed commercially to earn money for their livelihood, they did not perform because of their love for the money.

Goutam Das Baul remarked that Bauls could live as *madhukaris* because of *ashrams* in villages, wherein they would get food and money. However, this way of life changed after globalization, as money has inflated over the past 35 years. As a result, various Bauls started small business (Baul, Goutam Das, Personal Interview).

Bauls are now seen more as entertainers rather than *madhukaris* and *sadhak* Bauls. Along with religious songs and songs on their *tottos* like *baultotto*, *dehototto*, *leelatotto*, *manushtotto*, *premtotto*, they have started singing songs commenting on issues in the 21st century; songs on the social statuses and stratifications, songs on political governance, songs on discrimination of women, etc.

According to famous Baul performer Lakhan Das Baul, fusions of Baul music with relatively newer forms of music have made it more appealing on a universal level. Being an

international performer himself, he claims that although the intermingling of Baul music with others is what has made it popular amongst the crowd, this globalization and commercialization aspect and its mainstream success is one of the most prominent reasons behind the dilution of the essence of Baul music. He sees this dilution as the side effect of such sudden growth but he also feels that these newer forms have strengthened the connection between the modern audience and the original *Baultotto*. In other words, Lakhan Das Baul believed that these fusions have enabled the audience to connect more to what is being performed in front of them but, this addition of other styles to the original Baul music have kind of lessened the original message that was trying to be communicated. Ganguly says that these modern adaptations make it relevant today and creates music which the masses can relate and look up to (Ganguly).

Goutam Das Baul, the son of Deb Das Baul, has been in constant contact with this music form since his childhood. He has seen minute but noticeable changes in Baul *gaan* and says it has undergone an urban influence. He emphasized on the fact that his Baul counterparts have started singing cassette songs along with the Baul songs during concerts. All of these minor changes have led to a major transformation in the 'Baul feeling' and have created a variation in the environment and power of *Baul gaan*. At the same time, he said that the “commercialization of Baul music was inevitable, as a person cannot live a life without earning.” On this note, he said that his children were learning and playing Baul music, but they might end up working due to financial restraints. Kanhai Das Baul says that a change can also be seen in their *bhakti* (worship and devotion to god) and the *bhaab* (emotion). This modern touch has slowly transformed *Baul gaan* and hence, has slowly started losing its original essence (Baul, Goutam Das, Personal interview).

The organizer of the Manush Mela, Mr. Saikat has been researching on the Baul culture for 16 years himself. He claims that the instruments that have been used by Bauls since the inception of the culture are the same and merely the audience and listeners have changed. Although, it must be noted that Bauls from different districts use different instruments for their fusion versions.

Kanhai Das Baul had a strong opinion on the globalization and commercialization of Baul music. He said there were a very few number of Bauls previously and people didn't even know about them. In today's time, there are a vast number of Bauls but hardly any *sadhak* Bauls. The *peshadari* Bauls are the Bauls which don't follow the *madhukari* way of life and sing for



money and fame. They have been growing exponentially and have given Baul *gaan* a whole new dimension which differs from their core ideologies. He gives an instance of Tarapeeth itself where only 3 - 4 *sadhak* Bauls remain. Back when Kanhai was learning *Baul gaan*, Baul singers merely used the *khol*, *kortal*, *ektara*, *khomok* and *haath dubki*. However, in recent times, a western touch can be seen in the music as well as the instruments used such as casios, violins, flutes, harmoniums, etc. This incorporation of several western instruments has not only changed the way Bauls perform now, but also how they deliver their message to the audience. Kanhai Das Baul also says that there has been a tremendous change in lyrics. Back then, Bauls had a deep and intense writing style with layers of meaning and references. Now, we can see a stark difference in their ways as they have developed a simple way of creating and singing their lyrics which is comprehensible to all (Baul, Kanhai Das, Personal Interview).

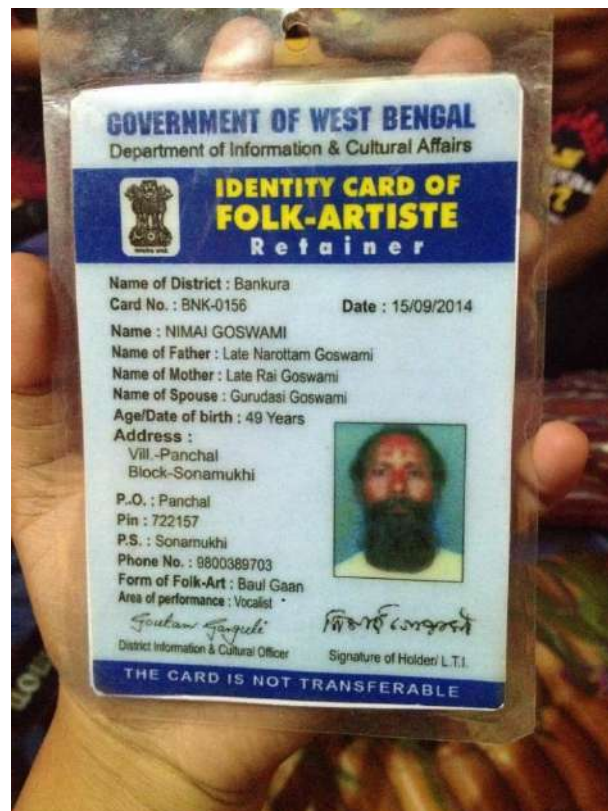
On being asked for Kanhai Das Baul's opinion on the introduction of Baul *gaan* internationally, he stated that he disliked even the idea of this. He said only the *peshadari* Bauls are capable of doing such things and it isn't correct as it goes completely against the true Baul culture. Baul songs primarily are about the *bhakti* towards God. The true *bhakti* spirit only remains when the Baul chooses the tougher lifestyle and opts to become a *sadhak* Baul. He says that a *peshadari* Baul isn't able to feel the *Bhakti* and hence can never attain that state of true trance. Some Bauls also believed that a *sadhak* Baul who has turned into a *peshadari Baul* has lost the power to concentrate on the connection with God and hence, fails to attain the state of trance through the vibrations of the various singing pitches. Kanhai Das Baul also adds that when a Baul sings in fusion bands, the feeling, *bhakti* and essence of Baul *gaan* is lost (Baul, Kanhai Das, Personal Interview).

Nimai Goswami was a Baul who got married at 18 years, and eventually started running his own business for a brief period of time. He eventually stopped his business as he believed it was preventing him from reaching God. He believed that it was fine for a Baul to have multiple professions, as long as the root philosophy behind it all stayed the same. He also said that he was a 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Baul, and that he would much rather put his children in school than force them to be a part of the Baul tradition (Goswami, Personal Interview).

Nimai Goswami also reflected on the change in instruments used for Baul music. He said that the commercialization of Baul music led to the use of bigger and more complicated instruments other than that of the *dotara* and *ektara*. He also said that the flute became

prominent after Bauls broke into mainstream international music culture. Goswami also said that he has been to countries like Italy, Bangladesh & Nepal alongside Indian states like Kolkata, Ranchi, Jharkhand, Orissa, and that this “commercialization” has not changed Baul philosophy in any way (Goswami, Personal Interview).

Nimai Goswami was one of the only Bauls to talk to us about the government aid and assistance Bauls receive. He mentioned that the government pays them 1000 rupees every month and 1000 per show as a token. In turn, they are asked to perform on specific themes such as women, God, etc. The government utilize the Baul singers as a medium to spread awareness on various topics such as the empowerment of women and the upliftment of their status in society (Goswami, Personal Interview). It is unclear whether this tie-up with the government changes their status from *sadhak* to *peshadari*. The intervention of the government has definitely helped the Baul culture to stay an important part of Bengali culture by encouraging the Bauls through monetary gains even though that does not play an important part in their philosophy.



6.1. Government ID of Nimai Goswami

Sanatan Das Baul also shed some light on government aid received by the Bauls. He described an instance in which the government paid him 20,000 rupees for 6 shows (Baul, Sanatan Das, Personal Interview).

Anubrato Ghatak claims that there has been a recent rise in western interest in Baul music. As a small community, the Bauls have transcended past social institutions much before we have. This alternative society has attracted youth with its notions of equality and a free society. Baul music has not changed much he says and a small part of the Baul community has received attention from Western media. Ghatak also specifies that these Bauls are often looked down upon by some members of the community- leading to friction (Ghatak, Interview).

With regard to the commercialization of Baul music, we realized that there was a lot of friction between the two types of Bauls- *Peshadari Bauls* and *Sadhak Bauls*. *Sadhak* Bauls wanted to maintain the purity Baul music had as it truly comes from the heart of a practicing Baul. The global appeal of Baul music has led to the commercialization of the genre, which has led to a rise in the number of *Peshadari Bauls*, or Bauls who practised commercially. It is hard to say whether this change is detrimental to Baul culture as music goes through various waves, or changes in sound as it progresses.

Here we are witnessing the evolution of Baul music first hand. The phenomena of modernization and globalization introduce new elements into existing cultures and societies. The constitution of a culture accommodates and adapts according to these new stimuli and existing traditions and beliefs are subject to change. The exposure of the Baul culture and its music in particular to larger audiences, even spreading internationally is no doubt playing a part in the development of the culture. As of now, changes can be seen not only in the music (fusion, non-traditional instruments etc.) but also through the formation of two distinct types of Bauls, based on their belief regarding the issue- *Peshadari Bauls* and *Sadhak Bauls*. What this means to the future of Baul culture remains to be seen but it is important to remember that no culture or society ever remains stagnant and every change contributes to its evolution.

## Chapter 7

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every research project, no matter how organized and well-planned has certain limitations. The biggest limitation that we faced as a group was the language barrier. We had only two translators- our mentor, Professor Ravikant and one of our group members, Ipsita. Between them, we were able to successfully conduct every interview we had planned and glean important and relevant information. Despite this, we felt that had we known the language, we would have been able to gain a lot more knowledge and personal experience. There were often times where our ability to further analyze an answer was compromised.

The language barrier becomes an even more significant issue when one considers the way in which the Bauls use language. Much like their songs, their conversations are filled with multi-layered metaphors and parables which may be interpreted in multiple ways. At the same time the Bauls use this to their advantage to either avoid answering a question directly or to deflect it entirely. Our interview with Sanatan Das Baul may be the perfect example of this fact, where at one point, his metaphors became so vague that even our mentor had some trouble translating.

Another limitation faced by the group was the lack of academic research done on the nature or role of music. Academics and scholars who had previously studied the Bauls had put a lot of focus on the philosophy, traditions and social aspects of the Bauls, but their music, while mentioned in some context or another seems to be unexplored with the same depth. This could be due to the abstract nature and depth of the music and the state of mind that it conjures. With the aid of some of our professors, we acquired few sources which deal exclusively with Baul music, however, much of the focus of these studies is limited to studying lyricism, language and philosophy.

Thirdly, we faced problems while interacting with Bauls at the Manush Mela simply because of the size of the group. Although this was not something that we had not initially foreseen or planned for, we realized that for such studies, where we were looking for detailed information from a specific group of respondents, being in a large group was disadvantageous. This was, however, an issue that we were able to manage and resolve when on-field. After learning from our first visit, we divided ourselves into smaller groups of threes

and fours for subsequent visits. We almost immediately found that this put the respondents at ease, as they were more comfortable and open speaking to a smaller group.

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that there are diverse theories and myths regarding the origin of the *Baul* culture, the general thought was the advent of “alternative” communities coming together on being prosecuted by the religious orthodoxy. These societies came together in Bengal, hence, leading to the inception of the Baul society. The main factor which drew them towards each other was the passion for establishing equality and freedom, irrespective of caste, religion and sexual orientation. A majority of the Bauls are either Hindus or Muslims and are from village labouring classes.

The term Baul draws parallels to the word *vatula*, meaning ‘divinely inspired insanity’. Through the research conducted, we found out that the Baul culture constitutes of two main areas: music and philosophy. Baul music is a Baul’s reflection of the *sahajiya path* and the philosophy is what drives the Bauls to sing in the particular fashion they do, hence, creating the extremely passionate and ‘madman’ experience. The music is used as a form of expression along with movement and slight dancing. Baul music contains references to its culture’s unique philosophy of life and their esoteric beliefs are often explained through their songs. The frequency and repetition of the music is such, that it assists one to enter a trance-like state, therefore, complying with the term *vatula*.

The Baul Philosophy revolves primarily around the simplification of complex existential issues. This involves the journey of finding *moner manush* while following the *sahajiya path*. It is based on the concept of creating equality amongst all and spreading peace, love and happiness. An integral part of the Baul culture is successfully being able to fight the six Arishadvargas. While Bauls are known to not believe in God, they believe in Krishna who is seen in a metaphysical way. They claim that Krishna is the highest authority of power and is purely human.

With the passage of time, many Bauls changed their lifestyle and there came a clear distinction between the ones affected by globalization and the ones attached to their *madhukari* lifestyle. From the inception of Baul culture, Bauls have been known to survive on the meagre *bhiksha* they receive. With the passage of time and the industrial revolution,

globalization and commercialization became quite popular and prominent. All the Bauls agreed to these visible changes in the culture owing to the same. The concept of modernization had taken the world by storm, and the Bauls were no different. Most of the *sadhak* bauls transformed into *peshadari* bauls, which quite evidently was against their philosophy and core ideals. With the increase in global exposure, fame and monetary value, many Bauls started performing on international platforms and evolved to 'fit in'. This was accompanied with simplification of lyrics, modern instruments, creation of fusions and a change in the true Baul feel. This, in turn, led to most Bauls following a more materialistic way of life. While the evolution has resulted into the slight loss of the Baul essence, it has successfully been able to capture the attention of a larger audience and hence, spread their philosophy. An important role of the music in propagating their ideology was that Bauls use their music to propagate a casteless, creedless society practicing religious tolerance. With a larger audience now relating to the music form, this could be done more efficiently. The effect of globalization on Baul music could thus change the lifestyle Bauls were best known for.

## APPENDIX

### Questionnaires

#### Research Question

How did Baul music originate and how has it evolved?

#### Aims and Objectives

1. To understand what Baul Music is and observe what separates it from other folk music
2. To study the unique way in which Baul Music is linked to their way of life
3. To study the role of Baul music in propagating the ideals of Baul philosophy.
4. To study and compare the differences in Baul Music geographically- Eg- differences in Bangladesh (Kushtia), Bengal. (Locally between villages as well)
5. To study the lyricism of Baul Music and track its changes to see if their values are changing.
6. To study the effects of globalization on Baul music (If the music itself is changing)
7. To study the changing trends in Baul Music and in turn their philosophy

#### Questionnaire 1-

Questionnaire for Academics and researchers

Main Respondents:

1. Mr. Anubrato Ghatak
  2. Mr. Subhendu Maity
  3. Mr. Arun Kumar Chakravarty
  4. Mr. Sushoban Adhikari
- What field of music is your expertise in? How long have you been in this field of study?
  - In your expert opinion, what are the key differences between folk music and classical music?
    - What are the differences in terms of rhythm, form and tempo?



- How does folk music differ in regions?
- What differentiates Baul music from other forms of folk music?
- How would you define a Baul? Who according to you is a Baul?
- Do many Bauls have other occupations? If yes, are most of them a part of similar fields or do their areas of work vary?
- How important has Baul music been culturally to West Bengal's folk music? Has it influenced other types of folk music?
- In your opinion what exactly is the Baul ideology? What do they believe in?
  - Why is music so important in a Baul's way of life?
- We have studied that Baul music is a tool for the spread of philosophy.
- What is your opinion on this mode of teaching?
- In your experience at Baul musical events, have you been able to receive its teachings simply through listening?
- How accessible is Baul music to the layman?
- What is the significance of music in the Baul way of life? Why music as opposed to another form of art such as dance, painting or theatre?
- What kind of audiences do you see at these concerts? What age group do they generally belong to?
- How relevant is Baul music and all that it speaks of to today's youth? Has interest increased or decreased?
- How has Baul Music been affected by its spread globally. What elements does western music add to Baul music?
- Do you think the international influence and the rise in Baul music fusions will give a new lease of life to the music, or do you think it will obscure its original message?
- From the perspective of a classical musician, how would you break down Baul music?

#### Questionnaire 2: Questionnaire for Bauls

- Who according to you is a Baul?
- What is the Baul ideology, according to you? What do you believe in?
- Were you born a Baul or was it something you adopted later in life?
  - If it is something you adopted, then what attracted you to the Bauls?

- Do you know any families where this tradition has been practiced for generations?
- What is the significance of music in the Baul way of life? Why music as opposed to another form of art such as dance, painting or theatre?
- What does Baul music try to convey? Is there a message or teaching?
- What do you sing about? Are there any recurring themes?
- Do you compose your own music or sing songs that have been passed down for generations?
- How is the music composed, what inspires you, are the lyrics formed first or the music?
- Are you a self-taught musician or did you learn from a guru (*moner manush*)? Do you have any professional training?
- What can you tell us about Lalon Fakir, the founder of Baul music?
- Is there a difference between performing at a mela and performing to a smaller crowd?
- We have read that Baul Music originated in Kushtia, Bangladesh and then spread to surrounding regions such as Bengal. What can you tell us about the origin of Baul Music?
- Baul music has changed over time. What do you think has changed in terms of the:
  - Composition
  - Lyrics
  - Delivery
- Baul music has changed with its spread from location to location- Kushtia (Bangladesh) to Bengal, Bengal to abroad. What do you think has changed in terms of the:
  - composition
  - lyrics
  - delivery
- What is your opinion on the entrance of Baul music into the international scene? Do you appreciate the additions and changes to Baul music such as fusion and the addition of western instruments?

- Do you feel that the use of Baul music in mainstream media downplays its spiritual significance? For example, the use of Baul music in the tamil movie *Kadhai* - where Raju Das Baul sang with other artists.
- Do you have any other occupations?
- Who do you usually perform for? Is there anyone specific you sing for? What kind of people attend your performances?
- The Annual Baul festival in Joydev Kenduli is happening in about a month. Are you looking forward to the festival? What is the purpose of this festival and who usually attends it?
- Personally, what are the highlights of the festival?
- Will you be taking part in the festival?

#### Specific questions for Raju Das Baul

- Tell us about your experiences working on music in the film *Kadhai*
- How did you get into the film industry and international performances?
- Where does a Baul fit in, in the media industry? Does the competitiveness and materialism clash with your values as a Baul?
- Today's youth are greatly influenced by popular culture internationally. Being a part of the younger generation, have these influences affected what you do? If yes, How?
- Do you have to change or alter your music to appeal to an international audience or do many people appreciate Baul music as it is?
- Since you have performed internationally and been a part of the international music scenario; In your opinion, does Baul music actually have an international presence or is its presence exaggerated?
- Do you see a shift in music styles of contemporary Bauls?

#### Kanai Das Baul (specific questions)

- We read that you started training to become a Baul at the age of 10. Who was your guru? Can you tell us about him?

- How has the music changed since you started singing?
- Who do you sing for now?
- Do you sing your own songs now?

Questionnaire 3 (For Audience):

- Is this your first time at a Baul performance or do you view these performances regularly?
- What aspects of Baul music appeal to you?
- Do a lot of people you know listen to their music?
- Why do you listen to Baul music? Do the lyrics play an important role for you?
- Who is your favourite Baul performer and why?
- Do you like the newer more western forms of Baul music?

## GLOSSARY

A short list of terms used in the report.

*Akhara*- A temporary structure constructed of cloth, traditionally used in Bengal by Bauls as a meeting room where they play their instruments, meet people and give discourse on philosophy.

*Bhakti Movement*- A Hindu religious movement with many rituals and rites regarding the worship of Gods. A prominent feature of the bhakti movement is the principle of loving devotion.

*Bhiksha*- Collection of alms.

*Chaitanya Bhagvata*- A collection of writings about Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a Bengali spiritual teacher.

*Chaitanya Charitamrita*- Another collection dealing with the biography of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

*Dotara*- A Bengali string instrument resembling a mandolin. It is usually strung with two strings but can also have four or five.

*Darsana*- Derived from the Sanskrit word 'Darshan', which means 'to see', Darsana is the holy sighting of either a religiously significant person or object that blesses the viewer.

*Ektara*- A Bengali single stringed instrument consisting of a round, resonating bass and bamboo neck. This instrument is most commonly identified with Bauls.

*Fana*- A sufi term for the annihilation of one's ego.

*Fakir*- In philosophical terms, a Fakir is no different than a Baul. But in religious terms, Fakirs are the Islamic branch of Baul culture. They generally come from Bangladesh and wear white as opposed to orange.

*Khamak/Khomok*- A single string instrument similar to the Ektara but consisting of a bigger, hollow body that also serves as percussion.

*Kirtan*- A kind of music performed in Bhakti movement rituals, based on ancient chanting systems.

*Madhukari*- A way of life involving collecting alms and food door-to-door, usually done by ascetics.

*Moner manush*- A perfect "inner being" that, according the Bauls, is the god within each of us. Every Baul's perpetual quest is to find this aspect of himself by looking deep within, and it is a search that never ends but always rewards.

*Sadhana*- Ego-surpassing spiritual rituals and practices. The nature of the practices varies with the movement or religion in question.

*Sahaja*- In the words of Tamil philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sahaja can be defined as "the last achievement of all thought", a term that implies enlightenment.

*Sarinda*- A folk instrument played with a bow, somewhat similar to a fiddle.

*Sishya*- Student

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