

Cleverness of Lalon

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Abstract : *This paper deals with cleverness of Lalon. Because of his having enough knowledge about the religious conflict of then Indian sub-continent Lalon took the opportunity to hide his identity or his root. Because of his Cleverness Lalon never mentioned his identity. During the Lalon's time (1774-1890) James Mill (1773-1836) in his book 'The History of British India (1817) distinguished three phases in the history of India, namely Hindu, Muslim and British Civilizations. This periodisation has been criticized for the misconceptions and we all know that religion in India is characterized by a diversity of religious beliefs practices. The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of some of the world's major religions namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Throughout the history of India religion has been an important part of the country's Culture. Inspire of having three religions Lalon has added a new dimension to the definition of religious belief. Though Lalon believes in creator he hates the different religious beliefs. All the religious beliefs were mysterious to him. Every human being has weakness in religion. Now a days all over the world we see that religion is the most important term. In the name of religion a group of people takes some opportunities to disturb the society. During the Lalon's time. Fakir Lalon shah thought that if he mentioned himself as a Muslim, the Hindus were never Conjugated to him and if he mentioned himself as a Hindu the Muslim were never conjugated to him. And there is no way to identify himself as an English man because of his own color and structure physically Lalon's life history is mysterious. There is difference in opinion about his ancestry, caste, creed and religion. He himself also remained Silent and indiffernt to the identity of his parentage. Depending on the source some claim Lalon shah was born in a noble Hindu (Kayastha) family in villege of Cheuria in the area known as Nodia in the Bengali presidency of British India ,corresponding to the district of kushtia in present day Bangladesh in 1774 AD . But the another Opinion is that he was born in a respected Muslim family. But Lalon Says*

Everyone asks " What jat does Lalon belong to in this world ? "

Lalon answers " What does jat look like ? "

I've never laid eyes upon it . some use Malas (Hindu rosaries) others Tasbis (muslim rosaries) and so people say They Belong to different jats But Do you bear the sign of your jat

When you come or when you leave (this world) ?

Lalon was against religious conflict and many of his songs mock identity politics that divide communities and generate violance. He even rejected nationalism at the apex of the anti colonial nationalist movements in the Indian subcontinent. He did not believe in classes or castes, the fragmented, hiararchical society and took a stand against racism. Lalon says .

Everyone wonders " What is Lalon faith ? "

Lalon Says " I have never seen the face of faith with these eyes of mine ! "

Lalon does not fit the "mystical or spiritual type who denies all wordly affairs on search of the soul : he embodies the socially transformative role of sub continental " bhakti and sufism "

I think every Hindu and Muslim has a sign to identify himself. By dint of sign every Hindu and Muslim can realize himself what his root is. In the question of religion Lalon always silent. Lalon always avoids The question of religion in his song and in his life time. Actually Lalon wanted to create a new belied where the people all over the world lead their Lives without any restriction. Lalon does not believe in root-but humanism.

Like Lalon Begum Rockeya Also Supports and believes in humanism. In Islam there are some restrictions for the women to go out side the home. Rockeya says that every woman has to have freedom in her Life. In ttinduism. The married woman who husband. This system was mysterious to him king Ram Mahon Ray raised his voice against the inhumanity. There arose a lot of problems in other religions. For this reason Lalon hates all the religious beliefs.

Lalon is the best mystic and folk bard the country has ever produced. Lalon Shah is generally adored by his devotees and is widely known to the Bangladeshi mass people as the 'Baul Shamrat'.¹ Lalon's foster father and spiritual Guru Shiraj Shain inspired him to the Baul doctrine. Dimoc (1966) defines 'Baulism' in the following way: "Man is the microcosm, containing the divine and all the elements of truth within himself. Realization of the divine means realization of one's true nature. And this state is a state of unity in which neither blow nor blessing, neither emotion nor non-emotion, neither sin nor righteousness, neither desire nor the abandonment of desire, makes the slightest difference.

The existential condition, however, is one of separation, and the 'Baul' songs rest heavily upon the longing of man's soul for what Tillich calls "reconciliation" and upon the pain attendant to the assertiveness of the lower self, the senses, in hindering it." Lalon founded a new community known as Lalon- Baul community. Basically, they are the devotees and followers of Lalon and his philosophy. With utmost devotion they passed some certain period of time either with their spiritual Guru, Lalon, in his lifetime or in the premise of Lalon's Akhra² after his death, memorized his songs and scattered throughout the country for the spread of his songs and philosophy. Haroonuzzaman (2008) says that 'Bauls' are,

actually, a spiritual sect of saffron-clad, wandering minstrels who sing of joy and love and long for a mystical union with the divine. They hold the view that God remains unseen in the heart of man and no priest or prophet or ritual helps to find out Him. The 'Bauls' are in the opinion that both temple and mosques stand on the way to the path of truth hindering the search for God. They express the opinion that the search of God is a must for every human being for the spiritual union with God.

On the other hand, Donne (1572-1631), the father of the school of metaphysical poetry, who was born in London in a financially affluent Roman Catholic family, gave up his faith to embrace the Church of England and was educated in both Oxford and Cambridge but could Mystic Songs and Love Lyrics of Lalon and Donne: A Comparative Study 167

not avail of any degree because of his reluctance in taking the Oath of Supremacy required at graduation. Later he embarked upon legal education. His promising vocation started with joining Queen Elizabeth's last Parliament but his secret marriage with Anne More, the daughter of Sir George More, a Lieutenant of the Tower,

brought about the ruin of his career amounting to his instant dismissal of his job. Further, his father-in-law left no stone unturned to corner him in all respects for a dozen of years. Donne summed up this incident in a small sentence "John Donne, Anne Donne and Undone." He underwent ups and downs in his life and finally could win the favor of the then kings through his literary compositions (Walton, 1927). Donne exercised a tremendous influence on his successors.

The term 'Metaphysical' refers to a group of seventeenth century learned poets which includes John Donne and his followers – Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, John Cleveland and a few others. Martz (1962) observes that Metaphysical poetry is a new kind of seventeenth century English poetry. Martz' observation is that Metaphysical poetry was 'fertilized and developed by the meditative tradition'. Eliot (1961) remarks that metaphysical poetry is a new genre of poetry with distinctive marks that include a blending of intellect and emotion, striking imagery, wealth of learning displayed in allusions, conversational tone and accent, colloquial language, rough meter, an array of moods, highly suggestive language, compact style, far-fetched metaphors called conceits, 'intellectual, argumentative evolution' and a 'passionate reasoning that knits the first line to the last'. Dryden (2004) in a derisive comment on Donne says that "He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires but also in his amorous verses..." Metaphysical poetry chiefly deals with some abstract ideas or concepts like death, religion, faith, God, soul, love and the like which do not have any concrete shape. In her compliments of Donne's technical originality Bennet (1963) comments that His subject –matter was, as has been seen, confines almost entirely various aspects of love and religion; but his imagery reveals the width of his intellectual exploration.

Both Lalon's and Donne's poems are highly philosophical and meditative in nature. Both of them mostly capitalized the theme of love, religion, soul, God, death etc. and ventured to philosophize those in their religious poems and love lyrics. Lalon plainly renders a concrete interpretation of what life is; the nature and function of human body and soul; the relation between God and human beings, the role of religion in determining the status of man irrespective of cast and creed; men-women relation and the theory of failure and success of mundane life in his Allatottoo, Rasultattoo, Shristitottoo, Murshidtottoo, Attotottoo, Dehotottoo,

Manushtottoo, Montottoo, Poromtottoo, Jatitottoo, Parapartottoo, Chandtottoo, Rooptottoo, Premtottoo,

Gurutto, and Baultotto songs. Actually, the greatness of a poet lies in his philosophical outlook to human life, nature and God. One of the eminent romantic poets S.T. Coleridge says, "No man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher." ³ Every poem of Lalonde is full of profound philosophy. Those who do not believe in Baul International Journal of Ethics in Social Sciences, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 2014 168

philosophy cannot but recognize the literary value of Lalonde's lyric and are deeply moved by his melody. A well-known intellectual of Bangladesh, Sirajul Islam Chowdhury is one such person. "I am a materialist. I believe in this world and the other one interests me but little.

However, I love the music of Lalonde for its sheer lyrical quality" (Haroonuzzaman, 2008). Even many of Tagore's songs bear the traits of Lalonde's philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore was introduced to Lalonde and developed a deep affinity towards the man at the time of his looking after his family estate at Kuthi Bari, Shilaidah, Kustia district. Tagore candidly admitted Lalonde's influence over him in many of his lectures at home and abroad. He was influenced by Lalonde's songs in such a degree that Tagore started collecting his poems. In his Oxford speech Rabindranath compared Lalonde with the sage of Upanishad without mentioning his name. He says, "The village poet evidently agrees with our sage of Upanishad who says that our mind comes back baffled in its attempt to reach the unknown being; and yet this poet like the ancient sage does not give up adventure of the infinite thus implying that there is a way to its realization." (Biswas, 2000). Abu Ishahaq Hossain (2009) says, "Rabindranath was seized by imitable style of Lalonde, which deluged the language and thought of his great poetry 'Balaka' and 'Mukta Chanda'."

Like the American poet Walt Whitman Lalonde celebrates the freedom of the body and the soul.

He was opposed to all casteism, sectarianism and colonialism. His philosophy of life was deeply imbued with humanism. Like Socrates Lalonde also believes the most important thing in one's life is to 'Know Thy-self'. If one can know his self, he/she will be immersed with God (Shaheen, 2003). To Lalonde all human beings are equal regardless of caste and creed, rich and poor. Discrimination and differences among men are but made by mundane consideration. It bears no value in the life here after or with God since death levels us all alike. Love which is determinant of a peaceful living on the earth reigns supreme. Though he strived to quench his spiritual thirst by merging with the Divine entity which is a fathomless and constant source

of inspiration for him, Lalonde endeavoured to satiate his physical love in courting with his female counter part. He is a hermit with all flesh and blood. Many of his erotic and flare songs stand the testimony to his fond of carnal love.

On the other hand metaphysical poetry is saturated with love which is the supreme concern of Donne's mind, the preoccupation of his heart, the focus of his experience, and the subject of his poetry. The centrality and omnipresence of love in Donne's life launched him on a journey of exploration and discovery. He sought to comprehend and to experience love in every respect, both theoretically and practically. As a self appointed investigator, he examined love from every conceivable angle, tested its hypotheses, experienced its joys, and embraced its sorrows. As Joan Bennett said, Donne's poetry is "the work of one who has tasted every fruit in love's orchard. . ." (Bennet, 1973). Combining his love for love and his love for ideas, Donne became love's philosopher/poet or poet/philosopher. In the context of his poetry, both Mystic Songs and Love Lyrics of Lalonde and Donne: A Comparative Study

169 profane and sacred, Donne presents his experience and experiments, his machinations and imaginations, about love. "Donne's love-poems take for their basic theme the problem of the place of love in a physical world dominated by change and death. The problem is broached in dozens of different ways, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, sometimes by asserting the immortality of love, sometimes by declaring the futility of love" (Martz, 1973). In any case, the overwhelming question for Donne, according to Martz, was "what is the nature of love, what is the ultimate ground of love's being?" (Martz, 1973). Andreassen (1967) has devoted a whole book to the subject of Donne's philosophy of love in which he deals with what he called "the central problem in Donne's love poetry: the nature of love dramatized in each poem and the attitude expressed by the poem toward that kind of love and toward the nature and purpose of love in general".

Donne is mostly Ovidist in intriguing playful, gay love, at times Petrarchist in perpetuating sexual pleasure and frequently Platonic in genuine and serious love. More importantly, transcending his predecessors' love theory, he emerges as a Neo-Platonic having the conviction that "Love, for Donne, was not body only, nor soul only, but soul and body working together in tandem" (quot. in Naugle). In vindicating his philosophy of love he brushes aside the misconception of the Mediaeval theory of corrosive effect of sexual love on life and energy. He purposefully attempted to unfetter the

Renaissance ladies from the darkness of blind faith to the light of faithful credence. But eventually the emphasis on the synchronization of physical and mental love promotes into mystic love as they find way merging into spiritual love- the love of God. For Donne the union of both bodies and souls without union with God would be idolatry.

Lalon's songs and Donne's 'Holly Sonnets' bear the traits of mysticism. Lalon is a mystic poet and his lyrics are mystic songs in the sense that Lalon and his followers hold the view that God is hidden in the human heart and neither priest nor prophet, nor the ritual of any organized religion, will help man to find Him there. They believe that the God within them is the same God within all human beings. There is no beauty truer than God. Their songs are of joy, love, and of their deep longing for mystical union with the divine. Through their simple, meaningful songs which contain philosophy and aspirations to be merged with the Supreme Being, they seek to soothe, share and provoke thought (Haroonuzzaman, 2008).

Mysticism refers to beliefs and practices that go beyond the liturgical and devotional forms of worship of mainstream faith by engaging in spiritual practices such as breathing practices, prayer, contemplation, and meditation, along with chanting and other activities to heighten spiritual awareness. The central idea of mysticism is exploring, awakening, purifying and illuminating the self and to keep it free from all kinds of evils and earthly pleasures in pursuit of the unification with the Supreme Being (Louth: 2007). Mysticism is usually thought of as being of a religious nature, which can be either monastic or theistic. The objective of monastic mysticism is to seek unity and identity with a universal principle; while theistic International Journal of Ethics in Social Sciences, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 2014 170 mysticism seeks unity, but not identity, with God. The immanence view of the universe is not projected from God, but is immersed in God (Underhill:1911).

Lalon's philosophy is comparable to the philosophy Persian mystic Sufis and Poets like Rumi, Jami, Hafeez and Ibnul Arabi and Socrates. Theistic mysticism has always been an integral part of the thoughtful Bengali psyche. That is why most likely the great mystic Sufis like Shah Jalal, Khanjahan Ali, Shahmakhdum, Mahi Sawar who proved more influential in the spread of Islam in Bangladesh. But Lalon Fakir is not a traveler in their paths. Lalon's songs speak about the special bond that exists between the creator and the creations. Rahman (2003) in one of his articles while illuminating Lalon's invention of a new folk

genre points that Baul songs have a hippy (maddening) like attraction and they share many other branches of Bangla folk music traditions such as Kabi Gaan, Pala Gaan, Keertan, Harikeertan, Bhatiali, Bhauaia, Murshidi etc. Lalon Shah, born in an uneducated family, was deserted by his fellows when he was caught by small pox, a contagious disease on their way back from attending a Kheturi Mela⁴ held in the Bangla month, Magh. The ailing Lalon was rescued and nursed back to health by a Muslim couple. This incident left a deep mark on his life and thought. He started to show indifference to worldly life and led a life in meditation. Later coming in contact to Shiraj Shain, his spiritual Guru, he learned the subtle, deep and underlying meaning of love, religion, soul and God. Gradually, he conceived of and nourished a new concept of humanism, love, religion, soul and God which has profoundly been reflected in numerous songs composed and sung by him. A strong negation towards Hindu caste system grew and the idea of a religion which embraces all equally in its net of love and a God who remains hidden in human heart developed fervently in him which is now considered the Lalon-Baulism. He gave up faith in any traditional and established religion like so called Hindu religion and Islam. He settled in Seuriya, a village in Kustia district of Bangladesh became a traveling mendicant and loved to compose songs orally and sing before his ever increasing devotees (Rahman, 2003).

The creator is one and second to none and like the Sufis Lalon wants to immerse himself into the ultimate entity. Songs of Allatotto confirms Lalon's devotion to Allah. Allah is an amorphous entity but omnipresent. This philosophy is evidenced in Lalon's songs. Baulism believes that there is no beauty truer than the beauty of God in the universe that lives within our souls. Like another English mystic poet, William Blake, Lalon has the firm conviction that human beings are made after the image of God. So, he longs for a mystical union with the divine:

"O, how long will I

Wait to get the union of my beloved?

Like a swallow, I long for you every moment

O, my darling.⁵

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To Lalon, God is mysterious and it is very difficult to know him. His mind is perturbed with the

queries like “Who am I?”, “Who talks in me?” and “Who is that all powerful?” So, his quest continues even though he knows they live so close to each other. They are so closer yet they are so far. Like great metaphysical poets, comparing human soul to a mirror city where God dwells in, Lalon says: Not a single day I could see him

So near is Arshinagar. There lives a neighbor (Haroonuzzaman, 2001) Lalon continues his search for God as he wants to be united with his illusory neighbor. The amorphous, incorporeal lord appears to His creation in unending images like Ram, Rahim, Karim, Kala etc. ----- “Who knows what is he like?”

According to Lalon, if one can be merged with God, no sorrows will touch him in this life and the life hereafter.

“O the bird of mind, say Allah

No sadness will be with you.”⁶

Similarly Donne also seeks solace in the Divine in his sandiness and sickness. Towards the end of his life Donne continued to write his Holly Sonnets (1618) giving up writing love songs. While Donne was recovering his sick health he wrote private meditations, “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions. Donne was made the Dean of St. Paul’s in 1621 and could have made the Bishop, had his health permitted. Donne wrote his own funeral sermon, “Death Duel” and only a few hours ago of his death he composed “Hymn to God, my God in my Sickness.” The very title shows his urge for a mystic union with God (Walton, 1927). Rajimwale (2004) views in this way:

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