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An Analytical Discourse on Bauls' and Tagore's Philosophy – From Indian Philosophical Outlook

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Abstract

In this paper, I am searching for some special characteristics of Baul's philosophy and its resemblance with Tagore's philosophy as such. But, is there any such kind of philosophy actually existing? If such a philosophy exists, then in what sense does it exist? Rabindranath Tagore, the humanitarian philosopher, as well as in some sense spiritual poet was influenced a lot by some minor religious and philosophical sects of Bengal, i.e. Baul philosophy. Tagore got influenced so much about Baul's thought because he is also against the so-called institutional education. In this paper, the investigations have been made into how the philosophy of Bauls influenced Tagore's philosophical literature and how he has tried to uplift himself as well as his surroundings as a knower of ultimate reality. The ideologies of Bauls, whose liminal identities (of being in the world and yet outside of it) play a very significant role in the formation of Tagore's philosophical and spiritual identity in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century in Bengal.

However, I have briefly discussed the philosophy of Bauls, especially in Bengal, in the first section of my paper. Did Rabindranath Tagore get influenced by Baul's philosophy at all? In the second section, I have dealt with this matter. In the concluding section, the endeavour has been made that how the concepts of Baul's philosophy are reconciled with Tagore's philosophy.

Keywords: Vyakula, Diwana, Maner Manush, Jîban Debata, self-dedication (Âtmo- samarpan), Bodhi-hridaya

I

Bauls are a group of wandering mystic minstrels of Bengal. The true beauty of Bauls lie in their free spiritual nature. So, they have no typical sutras, books or any kind of ancient manuscripts to execute their own philosophy or 'tattva'. In actual sense, whatever they have observed in this material world, they have presented those tattvas in their music. Moreover, the name 'Baul' is not inherited from a particular traditional Indian philosophical system, rather it can be considered a cult, a special type of sect, a special kind of lifestyle that they have adopted.

The word 'Baul' was first found in the Caitanya Bhāgabata of Vrindavan Das Thakur as well as in Caitanya charitāmrita of Krishnadas Kabiraj. The word 'Baul' had appeared in a Bengali text as early as in the 14th century, but the word first came into use in the 17th century. So, one thing seems certain that the Bauls drew upon the bhakti spirit which swept across northern India between the 14th and 17th centuries, inspiring Ramananda, Tukaram, Sant Kabir, Nanak, and Cainanya, the so called sant cults through which the effects of Sufi Islam show clearly. Therefore, if we consider the Bauls as a religious cult, then it has mainly three factors and these are the Vaishnavas, the Sufis and the sahajiyas. From the

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Vaishnavas and from the Sufis come the Baul vision of the warmth and humanness and love of divinity. From the Sahajiyas, comes their conviction of his compelling immediacy.

But amongst all of these, one thing must be notified that their views or thoughts cannot be constructed as an 'ism' or 'vāda'. The way they are supposed to be a philosopher is something innovative. It was a sweet combination of different philosophical thoughts, which led them to establish a distinct secular view of their own. In this way, they have created their own philosophy, their own way of life, habits and practices.

There are many controversies regarding the interpretation of the word, 'Baul'. The etymological meaning of the word 'Baul' is 'mad'. The word is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vātul' or 'Vyakula'. The meaning of the word 'Vātul' is mad whereas 'Vyakula' means 'impatiently eager'. Many other theories suggest that Bauls are descendants of a branch of Sufism called 'ba'al'. These people originated from Iran in the 8th-9th centuries and they were very fond of music and participated in secret devotional practices. It is supposed that like the ba'al who rejects family life and ties and sings in search of his beloved, the Bauls wander about conveying the message of universal truth. The Muslims who joined with the Baul cult sometimes known as Āyul, for their madness is compared to the madness of Sufi 'Diwānā'. The word 'Diwana' indicates a particular mode of behaviour. Like the Sufis, the Baul searches for the divine beloved that resides in a human physical body.

In this section, the thoughts of Bauls have been analysed from their own philosophical point of view. Traditional Baul religious culture has mainly five elementary factors and these are: They are not the believers of Veda and Upaniṣads. They are the followers of the Gurumukhī cult. They do not believe in strict rules and regulations of the orthodox philosophical cult. Their way of achieving mokṣa is something different from any other orthodox view. In Bauls' philosophy, the human physical body is accorded the highest value. But they have considered the human body not as of the Cārvāka philosophy holds. Moreover, they are not confined to only the human body, rather according to them, the human body is a temple where the Supreme lord resides. The human body (Bhānda) is composed of Pañcha-bhûta (air, water, sky, earth and fire) and is the dwelling place of God (Brambhānda). So, in Baul's Sādhanā, the human body is not only the instrumental cause as well as it may be considered as the ultimate cause.

However, for Yogic practice one has to know the two important words in Baul's philosophy- one is chakra (wheels), the other is Padma (lotus). Like the sants as well, the Bauls are ultimately committed to an interior religion of the heart that transcends the outer aspects of all historical traditions.

The phrase 'Man of the Heart' (Maner Mānuṣ) plays an important role in Bauls' Philosophy. By investigating this 'Man of the Heart', the Bauls try his best to move to the upward direction though there is always a tendency of downward direction of movement. Through painstaking sādhanā, the Baul tries his best to move the 'Man of the Heart'(lotus) in the upward direction. The Baul guru helps his disciple to control their lust and passion and to increase the inner power and channelize it with the eternal flow in the circuit of chakra in one's body through the triad of nerves for the sake of knowledge and devotion, which helps them to unite with the Supreme power. In the connection of the 'Man of the heart' of the Bauls we find a happy mixture of the conception of the Paramatman of the Upaniṣads, the Sahaja of the sahajiyas, and the Sufistic conception of the Beloved.

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The Bauls also place importance on the mind apart from the body because they believe that all spiritual life is deeply rooted in the mind and the mind is also considered as an important part of liberation(mokṣa). They advocate in this connection that Prāna and Mana(mind) are two separate factors which work together in the process of cosmic evolution. Man possesses five sense organs and six inherent vices (Ripus) that are obstacles in their way towards liberation. So, if one fails to control one's mind from withdrawing the senses from the respective eternal objects then attainment of ultimate reality is impossible. Thus, in the process of ultimate liberation (mokṣa), both the human body and mind play an important role. Liberation of the individual self(jīvātmā) is possible only if knowledge of truth is obtained by a baul during the moment of the union of the Supreme Being (Paramātmā) and of the individual self(jīvātmā). At that stage, they may attain divine love as well as bliss and enjoy non-physical joy. It leads to the ultimate desired good of a total extinction of all kinds of miseries. So, Bauls are interested not only with the physical world, but also in the achievement of knowledge, which is beyond the experience of the world, that is, metaphysical knowledge of the universe.

Their sadhana is to search out the inner man or the 'Maner Mānush'. He works as the mediator between the man and the absolute Being. Baul's 'maner manush' or 'the man of the heart' got transformed into 'Jîban devatā' in Tagore's philosophical thoughts. In the next section, Tagore's philosophy in this regard has been discussed.

II

Rabindranath Tagore, in his writings, mostly in his songs as well as in his poetries, has very comprehensively dealt with Bauls' songs. It may be assumed by the researchers of Tagore's Philosophy that mainly three causes somehow attracted Rabindranath's interest towards Bauls' song and their versatile culture. The first and foremost cause that drew the interest of our poet was the simple but deep-rooted meaningful language that Bauls have used while constructing a song. The lyrics as well as rhythmic and poetic structure of the Baul song also impressed Tagore very much.

The second and the most important cause of attraction is the reflection of secularism as well as humanism in the Bauls' religious cult. Tagore admitted that the person who supports the Baul religion, is the person who is also the practitioner of the religions of both the Hindu as well as Muslims. There is no way to discriminate between these two religions. Tagore also observed that there is no conflict between korān and purāṇa in Bauls' music and literature. This is a concept of spiritual humanism that Rabindranath Tagore advocated in many of his literary creations. It is some kind of belief that the divine is realized through the unlimited potential of humans, universal love, and deep harmony with nature. In his writings, he offered that the individual self is intimately connected to the ultimate reality.

In the 'Religion of Man' Tagore says that-

'For the sake of this love
Heaven longs to become
And gods to become man.'[1]

Jîvan –Devatā, according to Tagore is the ultimate reality (asîm) as immanent in man. He argued that the ultimate reality is the infinite, transcendental personality found within every individual human being. This idea may be compared with the Vedantic doctrine of 'Tat Tvam Asi' (i.e. I and you are identical).

[1]1., Tagore, Rabindranath (1931), *The Religion of Man*, London

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'Thou' as 'Jīvan –Devatā' is identical with 'Tat' as ultimate reality. It is not a complete and unqualified identity, because 'Jīvan –Devatā' is 'Divinity within the individual'. In Tagore's theism, Divinity comes down to this world from the heaven and resides in the human heart. There is no inconsistency in this relation of identity in difference, because it is possible to comprehend such a relation even in ordinary experience as for example in the experience of love(bhaktiyoga). Tagore said, 'in love, at one of its poses you find the personal, and at the other the impersonal. At one, you have the positive assertion- there I am; at the other, the equally strong denial- I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again, with only this ego, how can love be possible?[2] He added more 'in love, all contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love is unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one or two at the same time.'[3]

Tagore said again, 'I felt that some being who comprehended me and my worlds was seeking his best expression in all my experiences'.[4]

The religion of Bauls is nothing but the religion of self-realization. However, the researchers of Tagore opine that this may be the third cause of Tagore's offering respect towards Bauls' religion. In Kolkata, in the year 1925, being as a president of Indian Philosophical Congress, Rabindranath Tagore, in his lecture, 'The Philosophy of our people', has said, "One day I chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the baul sect of Bengal… What stuck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarefied transcendentalism…It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the Divine which is in Man not in the temple, or scriptures, in images and symbols."[5]

The philosophical interpretation of this lecture was written by Professor Amiyaratan Mukhopadhayay. He observed: 'the Bauls have accepted the mind(mana), they have also accepted the inner mind and through this inner mind they are searching for the ultimate mind. Bauls are searching the 'man of the heart' with the help of their gurus. So, they start their journey from their own physical body and then try to reach the universe, and then to the universal humans and lastly to the universal nature which is ultimately the origin of consciousness.'[6] In this way, the Bauls are ultimately committed to an interior religion of the heart that transcends the outer aspects of all historical traditions. The Baul may say:

'Where shall I meet him?
The Man of my heart?
He is lost to me and I seek him
Wandering from land to land.'[7]

III

[2]2.Tagore, Rabindranath (2000), *Sadhana*, (p-114-115), New York, Mac Millan Publishers
[3]3.Ibid

[4]4.Tagore, Rabindranath (1931), *The Religion of Man*, London, p-96
[5] Tagore, Rabindranath, (1922), Creative *Unity*, An Indian Folk Religion(chapter-4), New York, Macmillan

[6] Mukhopadhayay, Amiyaratan, '(1380), *'Rabindranather Monodarsan'*, Calcutta, p-132-33
[7]7. Ibid, p-789

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In this section, it can be analysed that is there any fundamental distinction between the philosophy of Bauls and the philosophy of Tagore. Some critics on Tagore's literature argue in some way that there is a fundamental difference between these two thoughts. But, in this paper, I am not going into details about these things. The most important thing that has to be noted is that actually, the philosophy of Bauls is a very good mixture of different philosophical aspects like the Buddhist tantra, Sahajiya Vaishanava cult, the Sufi philosophy as well as of the different Upanisadic concepts. So, as a baul, in a real sense, being emotional, he must be a poet, a philosopher as well as a yogi at the same time. Mahammad Enamul Haque, in his famous book, 'Sufism in Bengal' has written, 'It is admitted by all that Baul mysticism is replete with Vaishnava influence, but unfortunately nobody has as yet tried elaborately to trace the influence of the Sufis on this peculiar mysticism in Bengal. We should note that influence of the Sufis was one of the prime constituent factors of Baul mysticism.'[8] The important thing that the Sufi philosophers have interpreted is to realize the individual self at first and then the realization of the universal knowledge would come. In Sufism, two aspects of man are supposed to be 'Nasut' which is his individual personality and the 'lahut' which is divine personality that is also present within the individual. In the Upanisad, the same concept has been ascribed as the 'Jîvātman', the individual self and the 'paramātman', the universal self. But, in the discussion of divine love that is already present in the individual self, the sufi philosophers have maintained that the infinity resides in the finite being.

In this context, it can also be pointed out that there are some differences between the concepts of Sufi philosophy and Baul's philosophy. Muhammad Enamul Haq in his book has mentioned, '...the difference between a Baul mystic and a Sufi mystic is this that a Baul is an out-and-out rebel and his creed too possesses a nature of revolt while a Sufi…outwardly professes a creed of Islam but does not do so in practice…'[9]

But, overall, it can be said that the Sufi philosophers come very close to the philosophy of Bauls. Both the philosophies have given emphasis on the truth of love. The Bauls expressed their view with the help of their famous song:

'Khānchār bhitor achin pākhi kemne āse jāi.'

In this song, Tagore has interpreted that the yearning of the singer is to realize the infinity within him in his own way. In this context, Tagore has used the term, 'Jīvan devatā' who is the ultimate reality as well as ultimate humanity. This ultimate reality is devoid of all kinds of miseries; we can feel him within ourselves and within nature.

The Vaishnava philosophy, which has become the popular religion of India, carries somehow the same message that divine love aims finally towards an individual's love.

Tagore has expressed the fact clearly that the characteristics of life are not only to complete within itself; but also, it has to be completed and incorporated from within. In order to live, the physical body must maintain its various relations with nature - not only to gain life-force, but also to manifest it. The same will happen with the individual self. It cannot live only on its own internal feelings. The Baul philosophy has established the fact that the physical body is the epitome of our inner self. However, to get the ultimate knowledge of the supreme, we have to acknowledge the combined knowledge of the physical

[8] Muhammad Enamul Haq, (1975), '*A History of Sufism in Bengal'*, Dacca, p-303
[9] Muhammad Enamul Haq (1975), *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, p-311

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body and the inner mind. And this can be achieved through the divine love that consists of the greatest glory of human existence. So, according to Bauls' philosophy, ultimate bliss is the realization of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our individual self with the universe and showering their universal love throughout the universe, they try to establish a war-free world. In this context, Tagore has propounded the concept of 'Bodhi-Hridaya',[10] that is attained by love. For love is the positive quality of the Infinite, and love's sacrifice accordingly does not lead to emptiness, but to fulfilment, to Bodhi-hridaya, 'the heart of eternal enlightenment'. Man's history of evolution is the history of his unending, continuous journey to the unknown in quest of the realization of the ultimate reality.

Tagore explained his view in a very beautiful manner. He does not believe in any type of dogma or 'ism', but he always realised the fact that in every sphere of his creation he synthesised an individual's personal existence with his universal existence. In this way, an individual can become a part of the universal existence where humanity must be focused. He also believed that divinity should be realized through human service and love for the individuals.

Tagore highlighted the philosophy of Baul in a very amazing way. He expressed that the Baul, throughout his whole life are going to search for the ultimate truth in their own human body and this is the ultimate end of man, to find the One which is within him; which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the proper way of spirituality. But that which is one in him is ever seeking for unity, i.e., unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purposes of will; its highest joy is when it reaches to the infinite one within its eternal unity. This inquisitiveness is for agony, the agony which originated from unlimited bliss. This agony is a certain kind of Lila where the finite being (choto āmi) meets with the ultimate being (boro Âmi). Both the finite and the ultimate being face the same agony and the reflection of this agony is continuously flowing through the ages. Thus, like Sufi, like Baul, Rabindranath also began his journey for self –dedication (Âtma- samarpan).

To wind up, it can be said that the concept of 'moner mānush' and 'achin pachi' in Tagore's philosophy resemblance the idea of 'purusamanantam brahman' of Upanisadic concept as well as the concept of 'spirit of intellectual beauty'[11] of famous English poet, Percy Bysshe Shelly. Tagore's philosophy is mainly a combination of three philosophical sects, i.e. the philosophy of Baul, the philosophy of Vaishnava and the philosophy of Sufis. In all of the three philosophies, which is most commonly emphasised in Tagore's philosophy is the concept of love. Tagore aspired to build up a world for the future generation where the entire society of mankind may become a very good blend of devotion and love. He may be considered as the first Folk philosopher in India who had incorporated a different kind of ideas of folk philosophy in his versatile creations. This type of Spiritual Humanistic approach in contemporary Indian philosophy plays a very vital role towards our society, to make us feel a holistic approach that we are actually belonging to a big family where there is no bar of race, religion, caste, creed etc and we can connect with every individual being through the divinity within. As soon as we

[10] Tagore, Rabindranath (1922), *Creative Unity*, An Indian Folk Religion(chapter-4), New York, Macmillan

[11] Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *A modern Eclogue with other poems,* Hunt's Examiner, 1817 and with Rosalind and Helen, London,1819

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align with our divinity within, we can make sure of our divine essence that is the intrinsic part of universal harmony.

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