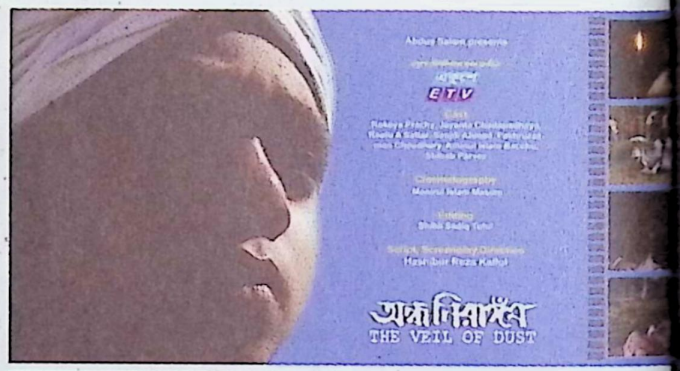
Upholding the Spirit



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Baul guru fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890) has made Baul songs a household name. Nowadays not only the urban audience in Bangladesh, foreigners are also interested in songs composed by Lalon because of the mysterious way he raises some of the compelling universal questions on life and soul. His verses, which the Lalon followers call Kalams, are the doctrines of the devotional rites of Ohedaniat, the belief that glorifies humanism. In fact, it is the devotional songs of a mendicant folk sect, which generally inhabits Southwestern Bangladesh.

The cult abides by a restricted lifestyle, following the advice of preceptors and the indoctrination of sahajasadhana (worship to be simple). Perhaps that is why Lalon, in his verses suggests to search for a maner manush (beloved) who will guide one to become a Shahoj Manush (simple human).

Like the other schools of Baul tradition, followers of Lalon believe that it is not possible to attain peace through physical love alone; divine love is also needed. Followers can have sexual intercourse but are not allowed to give birth to a child, as it is believed that by giving birth one takes on the burden of 'rebirth' on one's shoulder, which is something the Lalon followers prefers to avoid. Taking 'birth' in this materialistic world is considered painful. That is why the Lalon followers take Khelafat, the highest state of knowledge, thinking that at this stage one is prepared to absorb shain (Lord) in her soul.

After gaining Khelafat, men wear white lungis and long white tunics while women wear white saris and are forbidden to bear children, which, however, one is allowed do before attaining Khelafat. In his verses, Lalon





T-B: Poster of *Andho Nirangom*, Lalon devotees perform rites in the movie, Rokeya Prachy and Jayanta Chattopadhyay in a scene from the film.