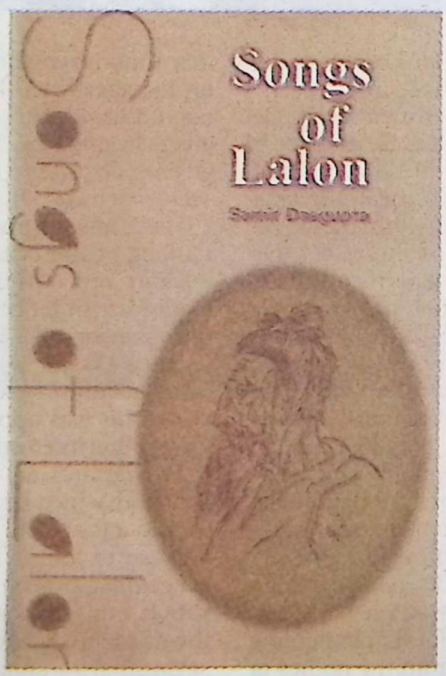
Songs of Lalon

How the Nameless Bird Enters the Cage

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Baul is a mystic-group cult, which flourished on the soil of Bengal during the early process of Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic synergy. Its root may be traced back through time even to the pre-Vedic Tantric cults. Lalon (1774-1890), the great exponent of Baul philosophy, belonged to the mainstream of the original Baul cult and added a critical social dimension to the already spreading subaltern stream of consciousness. His songs inspired Rabindranath Tagore to 'plunge into the river of beatitudes.'



Unfortunately, Lalon's songs are yet to be translated in its full volume. *Songs of Lalon* by Samir Dasgupta presents a slim collection of English translations of 34 prominent compositions by Lalon along with the original text and an authentic introduction. The followers of Lalon in Bengal are free from all kinds of earthly temptation and social bondage. They are forbidden to accumulate private property and reproduce children. Male bauls have their *sadhan sangini* or female companion without having recourse to any formal rituals of marriage and they vow not to reproduce child. They beg in the day and return to their *akhra* (place where people assemble for religious discussion and worship) by evening. They quest for spiritual splendor through composing mystic lyrics and adding tunes to it.

The author Samir Dasgupta informs us in the introduction of the book *Songs of Lalon* that there already exists a recommendable amount of literature on the life and work of Lalon Fakir, which is mainly anecdotal in nature and virtually unverifiable at this distant point of time. An obituary article, appearing barely a fortnight after Lalon's death in the long-defunct Bengali journal *Hitokari*, in its edition of October 31, 1890 should be of particular interest. This unsigned article, titled *Mahatma Lalon Fakir*, tells us that at the time of his death Lalon Fakir was a familiar name, not only in and around his *akhra*, set up in 1823 at Chheuria, Kushtia. His disciples, numbering around 10,000, were scattered over places like Chittagong, Rangpur and Jessore. At the *akhra*, Lalon used to live with his wife Bishakha Fakirani whom he married after his devoted first wife was disallowed by Hindu zealots to join her husband following his conversion to Islam. In deference to the strictures of his newfound faith, Lalon didn't have any children by his second wife either. As the legend goes, Lalon was born of Hindu Kayastha parents and during a pilgrimage to Murshidabad with other Bauls of his native village, he contracted a virulent type of small pox and was abandoned by his companions in a precarious condition on the banks of the Ganges. A Muslim man of the weaver community, Malam Shah, and his wife Matijan took him to their home and nursed him back to life. At their home,