Lalon met Siraj Sain, a Muslim rural philosopher - cum-Baul whom later Lalon mentioned in a number of his songs. The trauma of being abandoned by his own community and conversion to a new faith helped Lalon in attaining a very wide outlook on the question of religion. Asked about his religion, Lalon never answered directly and instead used to sing the following song:

They are curious to know what Lalon's faith is,
Says Lalon: The shape of religion eludes my vision.
Circumcision tells a Muslim from others,
But what is the mark of his woman?
The Brahman is known by his thread,
How do I tell who is a Brahmani?

Lalon's *akhra* was situated in the zamindari estate of Rabindranath Tagore and a local postman named Gagan (1840-1910), a direct disciple of Lalon, is believed to have been the poet's primary source of collection of Lalon's songs- songs that profoundly influenced his spiritual-philosophical ideas and were seminal to his finest poetic imagery. Some of the Lalon's best known lyrics such as *Moner manush moner madhye koro anweshan, Amar e ghar khanay ke biraj kare* and *Khanchar bhitor achin pakhi komne ashe jay* might have contributed largely in shaping Tagore's mystic philosophy and secular humanism. The last poem, incidentally, is alluded to in various writings of Tagore, including his celebrated epic-novel *Gora* (1910). In Dasgupta's translation, this widely acclaimed song reads:

Tell me how the nameless bird
Enters the cage,
Flies away...
If only I could catch it once,
I would
Throw my mind's chain around its feet.
This house has eight chambers with nine doors,
There are lattices on the walls,
And a Hall of mirrors at the top.

According to Dasgupta, the ever-intriguing phenomenon of the menstrual cycle and the seminal fluid (the archetypal water of creation' in Tantric-Baul lingo), and the five elements of the universe, including the human body imagined to be the abode of the *Atma* or the soul (*achin pakhi* or the *nameless bird*), are supposed to make for the ultimate communion with the *Paramatma* (Supreme Being). These constitute the cardinal features of *Dehatatwa*, the means to attain salvation through cultivation of the body. Tagore, a man of puritan Victorian learning, however, avoided the portion of cultivation of the body or *Dehatatwa* in his own adoption of Baul philosophy. *Songs of Lalon* would be a good hand out for the researchers. ■


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