

OPINION

MUCHKUND DUBEY AND HINDI TRANSLATION OF FAKIR LALON SHAH'S WORKS

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I have read reports in The Daily Star as well as in the Prothom Alo about a discussion held in Dhaka on 27th March 2016 by the eminent Muchkund Dubey, former High Commissioner of India in Bangladesh, focused on his efforts to translate Fakir Lalon Shah's work into Hindi. While I respect his deep admiration of Lalon, I am constrained to note that in his well meaning intentions to 'spread the message' of the Sage so that they 'claim their own place in bookshops and libraries all around the world' and other comments in the reports, demonstrates a thought process that has strains of overt patronisation, language chauvinism and supremacism.

It is precisely this thought process that puts a brake on the lofty ideals of Fakir Lalon Shah's message and his enduring legacy. If in Dubey's words 'humankind is one' then his intention to delineate mankind into languages other than ones of the original stakeholder defeats ultimate objectives of the South Asian liberation philosophy or 'jogot mukti' as articulated by Lalon.

It is also hurtful that discussions following Dubey's presentation had many Bangladeshi 'academics and intellectuals', Lalon scholars as well as researchers - yet there was none in the audience to present things in their coherent perspectives. Coming a month after the International Mother Language Day, it was imperative of the intellectuals to insist on Bangla language, not because as a nation we believe in language chauvinism, not even because we are 'parochial' - but through a conscious realisation that the foundation of Bangladesh as a nation state was because of our Bangla language, that the sparks of our own liberation struggle from the Pakistanis came because our language was oppressed.

While we are in no way opposed to translation of Lalon's works, least of all Hindi, our objections on Dubey's translation is his insistence that if done in Hindi, Lalon will reach a 'world audience' begets a few questions and counterpoints. Is Hindi at all a world language?

While lists of spoken languages have always been controversial, Hindi dominates South Asia given the sheer size of India's population. However as per the Ethnologue Report updated in 2015, Bangla with 210 million speaker ranks 8th in position of spoken, whereas Hindi (together with Urdu) with 160 million speakers ranks 11th. If this be true and since a majority of Bangladesh's and West Bengal's Bangla speakers have absolutely no issues understanding Hindi, where then lies the problem of Hindi speakers to learn Bangla to understand the verses of Fakir Lalon Shah?



A common sight at Fakir Lalon Shah Shrine in Seuria, Kushtia - LTR a Gouriya Vaishnab a title Maulana and a Baul Sadhu Guru in one frame. Day 3 of Fakir Lalon Shah DouL Purnima Utshob March 24th 2016. PHOTO: MAQSOODUL HAQUE

Dubey makes fundamental errors of judgment when he calls Lalon's work 'poems' and him a 'poet' when in reality they/he are anything but! His works are 'verses' embodied in words that are their own divinity. Lalon wasn't a 'Saint poet' for he claimed no honorific more than a 'Fakir', which duo entendre implies - a) humble seeker of deep knowledge, and b) the poorest of the poor. Terming Lalon a 'Saint' severely contradicts and limits Lalon the Sage, the visionary, for his revulsion for humans raised to 'pedestal for worship' is well known and had no place in his persona.

Dubey terming Lalon an 'illiterate' is disrespectful. Lalon's wisdom, vision and state of consciousness, if not taken into consideration, the translation of his work may just be another exercise in futility. Other than seeking deep knowledge, Meandering perplex 'shandyo bhasha' or metaphorical language embedded within verses, Bengals divine thought process has to be captured through its own unique praxis. Baul life is an experiential process and is to be lived and exercised to the fullest. Verses cannot be randomly 'intellectualized' because the concept of Lalon's 'bhaaber udoy' or the 'connect to the divine' is just not in singing his songs or reading them as poetry. Nothing can be

advanced without understanding his informal curriculum and living life of a *Shadhok* - a seeker.

The curriculum has four rigorous stages 1) *Shulo Desh* - mundane level 2) *Proborto Desh* - transformative seeker 3) *Shadhok Desh* - an acknowledged seeker 4) *Siddhi Desh* - a perfected seeker, Sage, Godhead, Guru. Thus more than relying on 'educated' yet fossilized 'intellectuals' to assist him in his noble endeavor, Dubey may be well advised to spend time with 'illiterate Fakirs' and Gurus down in rural Bangladesh to grasp Lalon for his translations.

While Dubey eulogises Lalon's messages having 'contemporary values' the truth is those 'values' are eternal and infinite. The inherent problem really is the current status quo will never permit Bauls to have their own cultural space in 'contemporary' society and the reasons are simple. Lalon's message has one dominant and foreboding warning and that is to discard the 'perform or perish' retinue of crass materialism.

One speaker is quoted as saying 'Lalon was both a spiritual person and a rebel', but truth be told, the world or even Bangladesh as it is shaped in 2016, the greatest and emergent enemy is corporatocracy, which nourishes

kleptocracy and all its associated ills. Lalon would simply not fit into this 'new world order'. Yes Lalon was a rebel - but if he was born in these times he would have spent time not in his Akhara at Seuria, but in a prison. The 'academics and intellectuals' besieging Dubey will have demanded that he be locked in permanently and the keys thrown away for good!

Fakir Lalon Shah is the property of the world yet his language was Bangla. His verses are 'un-translatable' and even editing his work is fraught with enormous difficulties. Part of the fractured legacy of Lalon can be noted in his earliest public verses edited and published by the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. In catering to the neo-elite of then Calcutta, Tagore circumsised many archaic Bangla words from the originals considering them 'out of context', 'bad spelling or grammar' and consequently many of the original messages of Lalon delivered in rustic Nadiya dialect have been erased from history. The dangers of translating Lalon into Hindi can hardly be over emphasised.

Nonetheless here is wishing Mr Muchkund Dubey the very best! The writer is a Dhaka based jazz-rock fusion musician and Lalon devotee.

POLITICS

Two men lying on the ground were helplessly trying to save their own lives. Their heart-wrenching cry for help was getting lost in the noise of the crowd, who were beating them mercilessly with bamboo sticks and wooden planks. One of the victims appealed to the mob to spare his life and asked for some water but the marauding mob of six or seven men did not pay any heed. Rather with a huge bang on the

head they finished the man off and within a few minutes they also flogged the other victim to death.

This brutal incident happened at Pabna during the recent union council election. Indifferent bystanders videoed this brutal murder and uploaded it on social media but nobody came forward to save the victims. It is very hard to believe that these two men were killed this way only because they had worked during the

election for the opposing party. However, this kind of unprecedented brutal violence happened all over the country during the local government elections, which for the first time in Bangladesh, was held under the ticket of political parties.

In the post-poll violence at Pirojpur district's Mothbaria upazila, five people were killed and hundreds of people were injured during a deadly clash between two rival parties. The actions of the law enforcers to disperse the angry mob were no less brutal. Indiscriminate shooting at the mob by the law enforcers killed a further eleven people. In two days of the first phase of the union council election from March 21 to March 23, 2016 twenty one people were already killed.

Amidst such unrestrained violence, the second phase of the election started on March 31, 2016. It was no different than the first phase. Another seventeen people were killed in the election clash and hijacking ballot boxes; occupying polling centres with armed party cadres were frequent. The consequence of such violence was also reflected in the result. In the two phases of the union council election, candidates of the ruling party Awami League got 50.96 percent votes whereas its archrival BNP got only 19 percent votes. In many constituencies, candidates of Awami League got more than 90 percent votes whereas their rivals

indiscriminately, is really unprecedented. Only in two phases of the Union council election, thirty six people were killed and thousands of people all over the country were seriously injured, losing all their belongings in the deadly clashes and arson attacks. However, as usual, the chief election commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said that they found only a few incidents of irregularities in these elections. Without any pragmatic plan to stop this mayhem, the election commission is going to launch the third phase of the union council election on April 23.

In the recent years, elections in Bangladesh have been stained with violence, arsons, murders, loss of property and explicit irregularities. According to a report of The Electoral Integrity Project commissioned by University of Sydney, Australia and Harvard University, USA, in the ninth general election held on January 5, 2014, twenty one people were killed, over 100 polling centres were set on fire and voting was suspended in more than 300 polling centres due to violent conflicts. In the following year, the political alliance which boycotted the general election started a movement in protest which killed hundreds of innocent people by the deadly Molotov cocktail attacks. Mayoral elections of Dhaka North and South City corporations held in April 28, 2015, were also no exceptions.

Article 11 of our constitution has clearly ratified Bangladesh as a democratic country. However, in the recent years, the main pillar of democracy - elections - has become a meaningless exercise. Recent clashes in the local government elections reflect that people in the very root level of our country have lost faith in this process and that our election commission is incapable of controlling such explosive situations which are serious threats for the democratic future of Bangladesh. ■



BLOOD STAINED ELECTIONS A FAILED DEMOCRACY

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

got less than 5 percent or even zero votes. Irregularities in Bangladeshi elections was never uncommon, however, such large scale, uncontrollable violence where the law enforcers shot and killed people

