

ESSAY

Farhad Mazhar and the Being of Lalon Fakir

SALAHUDDIN AYUB

Farhad Mazhar has long stood at the unpredictable intersection of poetry, politics, and philosophy. To some, he is a Marxist agitator; to others, a mystical seeker; to many, an enigma. But labels do little justice to someone whose intellectual project cuts across established categories, with little regard for academic gatekeeping or ideological loyalty. At the heart of his recent work lies a remarkable effort to excavate the philosophical foundations of Baul thought—particularly in the songs and sayings of Lalon Fakir—and to place them in conversation with some of the most challenging figures of European thought. This effort, spanning his books *Bhabandolon* (Mowla Brothers, 2008) and *Shainjir Doinno Gyan* (Mowla Brothers, 2009), reveals a thinker who is not merely interpreting tradition, but actively reimagining it as a living philosophical resource.

Mazhar's encounter with Lalon is not the sentimental recuperation of a folk icon. Nor is it the academic cataloguing of an "obscure religious cult" of the sort once found in colonial ethnographies. Instead, Mazhar approaches Lalon as a philosopher in his own right, a vernacular phenomenologist whose concept of 'odhara' (the ungraspable, the ever-elusive) anticipates—and perhaps even exceeds—Heidegger's quest for 'Being'. If this sounds implausible, Mazhar is happy to show his work. Through dense, often exhilarating pages, he draws out the resonances between Lalon's "Moner



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

This dream of a Bengali state, grounded in justice and governed perhaps by a philosopher-king, carries more than a whiff of Plato. Mazhar is aware of this, and somewhere in his writings is the dry smile of a man who knows Christendom too was ruled by such philosophers. But even so, he insists on the necessity of ideas. Without bhav, there is no future.

Manush", his elusive 'man within the mind', and the ontological ambiguity that haunts Heidegger's 'sein'. What Heidegger attempts in the abstract, Lalon performs through song. What Mazhar does is hold them together long enough for the sparks to fly.

Of course, Mazhar's interest in Lalon is not limited to metaphysics; it is deeply political too. His reinterpretation of Nityananda-Sri Chaitanya's companion and, in Mazhar's telling, the true initiator of Bengal's revolutionary Bhav movement—allows him to distinguish between bhakti and bhav, between a scriptural devotion tied to Brahminical hierarchy and a folk ontology rooted in bodily practice, sensuality, and resistance. For Mazhar, the spiritual power of Lalon lies not in his rejection of the world, but in his radical commitment to transforming it. The bhav of Nadia is not a mystical escape but a philosophical ground for dismantling caste, class, and coloniality.

There is also the matter of language. Mazhar is acutely aware that bhav cannot be cleanly translated into "idea", "emotion," or "feeling"; it hovers

between concept and experience, between thought and embodiment. This is why he insists on staying within the Bangla tradition, not out of parochial loyalty but because that is where the term lives. In doing so, he also shows how language is not simply a medium of expression but a condition of thought. Lalon's verbal artistry is, in this sense, a philosophical labour.

Mazhar has never claimed to be an academic philosopher. He didn't finish his studies in New York, though he read widely—Heidegger, Marx, Lenin, Foucault, Derrida—and debated fiercely. Many of the Marxist formulations that later found their way into the works of Gayatri Spivak were already present in his Bangla essays. He used to joke about it. He wasn't bitter. Spivak became a theorist; Mazhar remained a street philosopher. He writes for his fellow men, as he often

says, to change their minds, so that they may build the Bengali state that never quite arrived in 1971.

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What makes Mazhar unique is that he takes philosophy out of the university and places it alongside farming, folklore, song, and soil. His work with rural farmers, his critique of global agribusiness, and his revival of traditional agricultural knowledge are not a detour from philosophy; they are its continuation by other means. The bhav-centered resistance to Monsanto

and Cargill is as central to his thinking as any reading of Hegel or Heidegger.

Farhad Mazhar remains a controversial figure, but that hardly matters here. The real question is: Who else in Bangladesh has tried to think so deeply, so seriously, and so originally with the resources of both east and the west? Who else has dared to place Lalon in conversation with Heidegger or Nityananda in opposition to Puri's temple theology? Who else has shown, with such care and force, that folk philosophy is philosophy—and that it may be the only kind that matters?

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CREATIVE NONFICTION

Writer in the dark

NAFISA AFREEN MEGHA

There is a strange insanity that comes with being a woman in her 20s. A haunting fear that follows like a thought lingering in the back of our minds, refusing to leave. The constant ache of amounting to nothing, even after devoting every breath we take in pursuit. That every unacknowledged sacrifice, every swallowed insult, every underpaid job, and every pretend smile might dissolve into nothingness, forever engulfed by the void of disregard. Each day feels like a theatrical performance, and the curtain never truly falls. There's a certain loneliness in that gnawing fear—the kind that rests behind the eyes of every woman, even those who have done everything right, yet still find themselves running on fumes.

There is a fine line between passion and hysteria, and I have spent my whole life being told not to cross it. They say I am the firstborn daughter of contradictions—someone who embodies duality, tenderness, and rage. The world made women like me believe there is something inside us that must be restrained: a fierce, unspeakable wildness that must be tamed if we don't want to risk being labelled as something not meant to survive in a world designed for silence. We constantly walk the tightrope between rage and grace, between self and sacrifice. This is the type of insanity we inherit: to chase dreams that slip through the cracks of reality.

There are days when the burden of that effort feels unbearable, when I wonder if all this wandering is just leading me back to the same place I started—unheard, unseen, and lost. Every stumble confirms the quiet voice that maybe they were right all along—that no amount of endurance will ever be enough. We are told the sky is the limit, as long as we fold our wings before flight. And still, I write. I write of compliments that sting like salt in an open



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wound, of pavements that turn into ghosts with watching eyes and reaching hands, of glass cages disguised as protection. Because what kind of writer am I, with so much rage, loss, and pain—and no words for it? I perform this act of rebellion in the dark, turning anger into art, grief into poetry, and fear into metaphors.

There is a strange beauty in the duality we carry. We are made to believe that we are always on the verge of madness, but maybe this is what selfhood looks like when it refuses to be dimmed. For us, passion and hysteria live in the same room, where one is celebrated and the other is villainised. But this fine line

between madness and ambition was never meant to be walked; it was meant to trap us. What they call chaos is often just the weight of constant endurance. What they portray as insanity is often just a response to unending oppression. There is no end to this, no wins and no redemption. No amount of sacrifice will ever be enough.

So I write. Not to heal or to prove myself, nor to inspire, but to document the injustice, the unfairness, and the inequality. I write to give form to what the world chooses to ignore. It is the only way I can give weight to every swallowed scream, every sincere nod, and every quiet surrender. Only we know what it means

to constantly balance on the tightrope of reverence and ridicule. We learn early to sugar-coat every sentence and dull the edges of our knives before we speak. So I write, not for grace, but to bear witness. My work is the trace I leave behind—proof that I was here and I witnessed it all. It is both my quiet revenge and my unyielding resistance. In the end, the last word is mine to speak.

Nafisa Afreen Megha is an aspiring writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work consists of her thoughts, carefully put into words and turned to poetry. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at North South University.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

Scent of the day

Iftehaz Yeasir Iftee

I wake up to the smell of coral jasmine
Those mushrooms in my garden of dreams.
I can't but forget the weary smell of the dry leaves
And a hint of iris on top.
What was the scent about? And the stories it
carried with it?
I look for the name of the scent in the streets of
mahogany and mossy grass.
Ignorant, I look for the wearer of the scent.
Traces of wood and smoky pineapple,
Bitter grape and an emblem of cherry,
I keep looking for it as it plays hide-and-seek.
I sit in my rose garden and contemplate his
whereabouts.
Eyes closed, I harness the scent carried by the
winds.
Enticed, intoxicated, do you know where the
wearer can be?
I am just around you, come find me.

Iftehaz Yeasir Iftee is a poet and student at IBA, University of Dhaka. He has contributed to a global anthology of poems named *Luminance: Words for a World Gone Wrong* under his pen-name *Brotibir Roy*.