ATIS DASGUPTA*

The Bauls and Their Heretic Tradition

Of late there has been a perceptible trend to treat the Bauls and their melodious songs as merely a segment of the folk culture of Bengal which is occasionally presented with much fanfare for the entertainment of the sophisticated urban audience. In the process we tend to forget the popular philosophic tradition of the Bauls in providing a heretic counterpoint to the sectarian scholastic scriptures of both Hindu and Islamic religious establishments. The isolated presentation of the Baul songs seems to be somewhat meaningless unless the listeners are initiated to the underlying philosophic allusions of the compositions which have consistently negated, in an aesthetically discreet manner, the bondage of any institutional religion down the centuries at the grass-root level. The Bauls, however, were not the lone heretics. They had emerged from the broader Buddhist Sahajiya and the Vaisnava Sahajiya background and had also intermingled with the Sufi mysticism and the Bhakti movement of the mediaeval *sant* mystics of northern India. The objective of this paper would be to explicate the distinctive features of the Baul philosophy in relation to the other devotional mystic streams of thoughts in order to assess the historical role of their collective process in sustaining a popular tradition of syncretism as a viable alternative to the opposite trend of intolerant fundamentalism discernible in both Brahmanical Hinduism and orthodox Islam.

The villagers of Bengal, though mostly unlettered till the mass literacy drive undertaken in several districts of West Bengal since 1990, were well aware of the Baul tradition which had always been transmitted by the Bauls through the presentation of the melodious philosophic songs accompanied with a simple rendering of *ek-tara* ('one-string') instrument and soothing dance movements. The English-educated urban middle class, however, began to be acquainted with this age-old oral tradition of the village-singers from the early decades of the present century mainly due to the pioneering collections of Kshitimohan Sen and Muhammad Mansuruddin and their introduc-

tion by Rabindranath Tagore. Kshitimohan Sen's first collection of the Baul songs was published in an anthology of old Bengali songs entitled *Bangabani*, which was followed by his erudite article on the Bauls in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* which was subsequently reprinted as an Appendix in Tagore's famous Hibbert Lectures published as *The Religion of Man* in 1931. Kshitimohan's another noteworthy contribution on the Baul songs and their philosophy came out through the publication (by Calcutta University in 1954) of Banglar Baul (in Bengali) which was originally delivered as Lila Lecture in 1949. He had also incorporated illuminating chapters on the Bauls in his various important works, such as *Banglar Sadhana* (a Visva-Bharati publication in Bengali in 1945), *Bharate Hindu-Musalmaner Jukta Sadhana* (a Visva-Bharati publication in Bengali in 1949), and *Hinduism* (a Penguin publication in 1960). Rabindranath Tagore had himself devoted a special chapter (entitled 'The Man of My Heart') on the Bauls in *The Religion of Man*. Shortly after the publication of Kshitimohan Sen's first collection on the Bauls in the anthology *Bangabani*, Muhammad Mansuruddin published (reprinted by Bangla Academy, Dacca, in 1976) a collection of hundred Baul songs under the caption of *Haramoni* ('the lost jewel') with a perceptive introduction by Tagore in 1927. Two hundred ninety seven Baul songs of Lalan Fakir were added by Mansuruddin in his later publication (from Dacca in 1958) in the Bengali journal *Sahitya Patrika*. Upendranath Bhattacharyya, who had conducted extensive field work on the Bauls, was able to publish more than five hundred songs in his Bengali work *Banglar Baul O Baul Gan* in 1957. In 1959 Calcutta University came out with a publication of four hundred Baul songs of Lalan Fakir under the title of *Lalan-gitika*, edited jointly by Matilal Das and Pijus Kanti Mahapatra. However, the most comprehensive analysis of Sahajiya philosophy of the Baul songs was carried out by Sashibhusan Das Gupta in his outstanding work *Obscure Religious Cults*, first published in 1946 (the third edition was printed in 1969).

In the chapter 'The Man of My Heart' in *The Religion of Man*, Rabindranath Tagore had described how he was attracted to one of the basic philosophical features of the Baul songs—the concept of *maner manush* or 'Man of My Heart'. While Tagore was stumbling upon the formal constraints of the monotheistic Brahmo church of which his father was the leader, he 'came to discover that in my conduct I was not strictly loyal to my religion, but only to the religious institution. . . . After a long struggle with the feeling that I was using a mask to hide the living face of truth, I gave up my connection with our church. About this time, one day I chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the Baul sect of Bengal . . . What struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full

of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarified transcendentalism. At the same time it was alive with an emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine which is in Man and not in the temple, or scriptures, in images and symbols. The worshipper addresses his songs to Man the ideal, and says:

'Temples and mosques obstruct thy path,
and I fail to hear thy call or to move,
when the clerics and priests angrily crowd round me'.

He does not follow any tradition of ceremony, but only believes in love. According to him, 'Love is the magic stone that transmutes by its touch greed into sacrifice'.

He goes on to say :

'For the sake of this love
heaven longs to become earth
and gods to become man'.[1]

We would deal with this concept of 'Man of My Heart'—so exquisitely summed up by Tagore, and other features of the Baul philosophy in more detail. Before such an analysis, however, the social background of the emergence of the Bauls as a distinct group would be briefly traced.

The Bauls belong to the lower ranks of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities of Bengal and they are composed partly of householders and mainly of wandering mendicants. The word 'Baul' with its Hindi variant 'Baur' may be variously derived. It may be derived from the Sanskrit word 'vatula' (affected by wind-disease i.e., crazy), from 'vyakula' (impatiently eager). Both these derivations are consistent with the apparent life style of the Bauls which denotes a group of inspired mystics with an ecstatic eagerness for a spiritual life beyond the shackles of scriptures and religious institutions. The name 'Baul', as also its cognate form 'Aul' can well be associated also with the Arabic word 'awliya' (plural of 'wali', a word originally meaning 'near' which is used for 'friend' or 'devotee') that refers to a group of perfect mystics.[2]

The Bauls had their basic outlook anchored in the *ujan-sadhan* (or *ulta-sadhan*) or the philosophy of 'the reverse path' which was the fundamental tenet of all the *Sahajiya* traditions in Bengal and elsewhere. They proceed in a direction opposite to that followed by the general run of the unaware people. They avoid all forms of institutional religion in which the natural piety of the soul is overshadowed by the useless paraphernalia of ritualism and ceremony on the one hand and pedantry and hypocrisy on the other. It is for this reason that the Bauls and other Sahajiyas call their path *ulta-sadhan* (i.e. 'the reverse path') and denote the process of their

spiritual advance as the method of proceeding against the current (i.e., ujan sadhan). It has been said in one of the Baul songs:

'Reverse are the modes and manners
of the man who is a real lover
of the true emotional life.'

The ultimate object of the Bauls for this reverse journey is to return to one's own self which is *sahaja* or inborn in nature. This approximation to one's real self is fundamentally based on the method of self-realisation. Shorn of all kinds of religious insincerity and artificiality, this return journey of the Bauls for self-realisation is *Sahaja* not because the path is easy to travel but because it is the most natural path for the attainment of the 'ultimate reality'. The first systematised form of the Sahajiya movement can be found in the school of the Buddhist Sahajiyas which was followed by that of the Vaisnava Sahajiyas. The Bauls emerged from this earlier Sahajiya background and enriched the movement with their own specialities. They were subsequently indebted to Sufism for invigoration of their philosophy in certain respects. The mediaeval *sant* mystics of northern India would also enrich this collective Sahajiya movement.[3]

There were some instances of striking similarity between the earlier (the Buddhist and the Vaisnava) Sahajiyas and the Bauls. The *Charyapadas* and *Dohas* of the Buddhist and the Natha Sahajiyas, which had been composed about 1000 years ago, were characterised by a spirit of heterodoxy and criticism which would likewise be a feature of the heretic songs of the Bauls. Moreover, the earlier Sahajiyas put emphasis on 'Guru-vada' which, however, was contrary to the Brahmanic conception of 'Guru- vada'. The Bauls were also inclined to share the same Sahajiya perception as it appears from their 'Murshida' songs. Furthermore, the earlier Sahajiyas had considered the human body as the microcosm of the universe within which truth resided—the truth which had to be realised from within. This was exactly the conviction which the Bauls uphold consistently. Added to it, as already indicated, both the earlier Sahajiyas and the Bauls shared the initial formulation that the ultimate reality was *Sahaja* or inborn in nature.[4]

But the earlier Sahajiya cult underwent a notable transformation in the hands of the Bauls. The difference in ideology was subtle and it was reflected in the variation in the conception of Sahaja itself. The Buddhist Sahajiyas conceived *Sahaja* as 'Maha-sukha' which was the unity of the duality represented by man and woman as 'Upaya' and 'Prajna'. To this, however, the Vaisnavas supplied the element of love. But here also, *Sahaja* was conceived as supreme love which could be realised by the union of Krishna and Radha who resided in the corporeal form of man and woman. This process of *sadhana* was, therefore, a process of the divinisation of the human love which

involved a latent dualism in the interplay of *rupa* and *arupa*. On the contrary, the Bauls could overcome this dualism and perceive *Sahaja* as the innermost eternal Beloved who the 'Man of My Heart' (maner manus). The Bauls also spoke of love and union, but this love meant the love between the human personality and the Divine Beloved which resided within the temple of the body. In other words, the Baul concept of *Sahaja-path* was essentially a philosophic process of self-realisation. Certain elements of this new conception of *Sahaja* could be traced in the *Charyapadas*, but the formulation was much influenced by the tenets of Sufi philosophy of Islam. Among the earlier Sahajiyas, a *Doha* of Saraha-pada brought into focus the *Sahaja* perception of the Divine Beloved as residing within the body:

> Here in this body is the confluence
> of the Ganges and the Jamuna,
> here is the Ganga-Sagar,
> here are Prayaga and Banaras,
> Here are the sacred places,
> I have not seen a place of pilgrimage
> and abode of bliss like my body.[5]

This incipient trend of the earlier Sahajiyas paved the way for the evolution of the Baul conception of 'Man of My Heart' under the subsequent influence of Sufism. The mystic *Sant* poets of northern India in the mediaeval period, led by Kabir, Dadu and Nanak, had also contributed to the integration of the Sahajiya tradition with the Sufi philosophy. The Bauls of Bengal assimilated all these syncretistic traditions into their own basic formulations with characteristic innovation and aesthetic grace.

One of the areas where this process of creative assimilation can be easily located is in the Baul tradition of the out-pouring of the heart through their melodious songs. In this we find on the one hand, the influence of Chaitanyadeva's Vaisnavism, which had attached much importance to the *Kirtan* form of music as the medium of ecstatic communion, and on the other, the influence of the Sufistic method of *Sama* which combined song and dance as a mode of syncretistic religious communication with the common people.[6] The effect of such music, the Sufis held, would help both the performing mystics and the listeners in passing into *fana*—a stage of religious ecstasy. During the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries the orthodox Islamic clerics tried to prevail on the Turk-Afghan imperial government to barn the syncretistic practice of *Sama*. But the orthodox strategy could not make much headway in the face of rising popularity of the Sufis. At *sama* gatherings Persian poetry began to be relegated to the background as Hindawi poetry, with its Vaisnavite and other *Bhakti* imagery, came to the fore.[7]

As regards the concept of 'Guru-vada', the Bauls incorporated the influence of the Sufis and the other Sahajiyas, but went ahead of them in formulating their own philosophy; in this regard their formulations are more akin to those of the sant mystics of northern India. The stress laid by the Sufis on the Murshid or the Shaikh (i.e., the preceptor or spiritual guide) bears resemblance with that of the *Guru-shishya* relationship of the Indian tradition in general. This stress is borne out in the Sufi text entitled Awariful-l-Ma'rif: 'When he (i.e., the *murid* or the disciple) is possessed of manners, he taketh in love a place in the shaikh's heart and is agreeable to God's sight; because, with mercy, favour and care, God ever looketh at the hearts of His own friends (the darvishes).[8]

In the Indian religious tradition ordinarily one *Guru* is presupposed. The tantriks acknowledge two, who give intellectual and spiritual initiation respectively. But in the *sahaja* view, such limitation of the number of *gurus* results in narrowness of realisation. Dadu, the north Indian *sant* mystic and a true follower of Kabir, indicates the *sahaja* stand in a verse of salutation:

Dadu first salutes the colourless Supreme Person,
Next, as the means of understanding Him,
he salutes his *guru* as divine,
And then he transcends the bounds of salutation,
by offering reverence to all devotees.[9]

The *sahaja* idea finds expression in the tantras to some extent:

As the bee in quest of honey
flits from flower to flower,
So do thou gather wisdom
by going from *guru* to guru.[10]

In the Vaisnavite text *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, the salutations are also offered to *gurus* in plural.

The Bauls, however, introduced additional dimensions. They put it in one of their songs:

By what path comest thou, O Guru,
the mystery I cannot solve;
So it passeth my understanding,
where to leave my obeisance.

According to the Bauls, initiation is a life-long process, to be gained little by little, from all kinds of *gurus*. So they asked:

Wouldst thou make obeisance to thy *guru*, my heart?
He is there at every step,
on each side of thy path;
for numberless are thy *gurus*.

To which of them, then, wouldst thou make
obeisance, my heart?
The welcome offered to thee is thy *guru*,
the agony inflicted on thee is thy *guru*,
every wrench at thy heart-strings is thy *guru*,
that maketh the tears to flow.

The Balus, therefore, tend to conclude that the *guru* resides within the heart of the worshipper:

The *guru* who is the source of wisdom
resides in thine own home.
A great mistake hast thou made
by giving heed
to the teachings of all the world.

And again:

The voice from the depths tells thee
that the *guru* is in the lotus of the heart.

Almost in tune with the formulation of the Balus, Kabir, the great *sant* mystic of north India, would compose:

The Supreme Self, the *Guru*, abideth near thee,
Awake, awake, O my heart.[11]

Not that the Bauls do not admit any outward *guru*, but he is a danger to be feared, they feel, as well as a help to be sought; for, if he imposes himself on his disciple, he kills the latter's own spirit—a murder worse than the killing of the body. The *guru*, therefore, should minister to his disciple from a distance:

The lamp gives light from afar,
still further away is the sun;
the *guru* gives light without heat
who sits aloof in the truth.

The Bauls also call the *guru* 'sunya', not implying the absence of substance, but the spaciousness of freedom. That 'sunya' is not used in its negative meaning is clearly evident when the same concept is applied to denote the Supreme Being. Dadu had also perceived 'sunya' with the same overview:

What name can be given to Him
who is Nothing?
Whatever name we use
is less than the Truth.[12]

We have already seen that the earlier Sahajiyas and the Bauls recognised the human body as a microcosm of the universe and that

Sahaja as the ultimate reality resided within this form as our true self or the ultimate nature. So Lalan Fakir, the noted exponent of Baul songs, had composed:

Proceed carefully in your spiritual quest,
May be, you will find wealth very near;
Says Lalan, search your own home,
Truth is not very far.[13]

Traces of the *Sahaja* cult of the Bauls could be even located in the Vedas under the name *Nivartiya*, being described as those who conformed to no accepted doctrines, but to whom, having known the truth in its purity, all directions were free. Not bound by prescribed rites or ceremonials, they were ever mobile and in active communion with all by virtue of their wealth of the natural. Certain specific references to the vratyas (which may be translated as the 'heretics' or 'non-conformists') could be found in *Atharva Veda* in identical terms: 'The Vratya was active in all directions' (XV, 1.2); 'The Vratya is ever mobile' (XV, 1, 1, 1); *Atharva Veda* was also full of enigmatic verses similar to the sayings of the Bauls:

Man is a wondrous temple;
when it was made,
the gods came and took shelter.[14]

Let us now take up the Baul concept of 'Man of My Heart' (*maner manus*) in more details and find out the interplay of the other Sahajiya thoughts and the Sufi philosophy with the Baul perception in this regard. The Baul conception of 'Man of My Heart' brings in the question of its similarity or dissimilarity with the Vaisnava conception of love. The Vaisnava formulation is based on a principle of duality, theological, if not metaphysical. Theologically, the Vaisnavas have conceived a kind of duality between God and the individual (*jiva*) and this principle of duality invites the question of *Saguna Bhakti*, which gradually culminates in the conception of passionate love. Metaphysically, however, the relation between God and the individual has often been spoken of as incomprehensible—a relation of dualism in non-dualism. On the contrary, the Baul conception of *nirguna bhakti* is strictly based on a non-dualistic approach. [15]

The Bauls have often criticised the Vaisnava followers. 'Had these Vaisnavas the understanding, they would have known better that Chandidas, vidyapati and others were good Vaisnava poets simply because they had had glimpses of *Sahaja* ideas. But are their followers competent to understand their message? They took the idea of Radha from us, but have dragged her down to the level of their low desires. Devoid of the realisation of the simple, their minds, obsessed

with the complexities of their literature, fail to do justice to the wealth they have inherited. At best they make an attempt at simplicity and naturalness in their songs and festivals, but in their lives, their temples, their religious observances, they are unable to get free of the shackles of their scriptures. They have made a jumble of love and desire, the workings of the spirit and the inclination of the senses'.[16] A Vaisnava once asked a Baul whether he was aware of the different kinds of love as classified in the Vaisnava scriptures. The Baul instantly gave his reply in a song:

A goldsmith, I think, has come
into the flower garden.
He would appraise the lotus,
By rubbing it on his touchstone!
Oh the fun, what a pity![17]

The Bauls, however, have always paid high regards to Chandidas. In particular, the following song of Chandidas which was mentioned by Rabindranth Tagore in *The Religion of Man* for its philosophical and literary richness, has always evoked very positive response from the Bauls:

Listen, O brother man,
the Truth of Man is the highest of truths;
there is no other truth above it.[18]

To conform to the emotional approach of the Bauls, the *sahaja* or the ultimate reality has gradually been transformed into a personal God. This *Sahaja* as the personal God is the 'Man of My Heart' which intrinsically calls for the realisation of the *Sahaja* or the ultimate nature of true self. The Baul conception of love is the love between human personality and the Divine personality residing within us as the true self or our *Sahaja*-nature. As already indicated, the creed of the Bauls is, thus, fundamentally based on the question of self-realisation. This pivotal factor of self-realisation was also stressed in the Upanishads, but the eternal love as envisaged by the Bauls was not given much importance in the Upanishadic formulation of self-realisation.[19]

Let us now deal with the Sufistic conception of divinity and the ideal of love. The Sufistic overview in this regard can be located in Aliraja's Sufi text entitled the *Jnana-Sagar* . There it is said that God in his absolute aloneness could not realise His love and a second or a dual was required as the beloved. The Absolute, therefore, created a dual out of its ownself. The *Jnana-sagar* upholds that the universe had its origin in love, and the chaos was systematised into the cosmos through the bond of love. Man is the microcosm in which all attributes of the Absolute are united. Man thus synthesizes within his nature two

aspects of existence: these are called in Sufism the *nasut*, which is his human personality and the *lahut*, which is his Divine personality.[20] This conception of the Divine and the human combined in man may well be affiliated with the Upanishadic conception of the *Paramatman* and the *Jivatman*. But while the Upanishads speak of the love between the Divine personality and the human personality more or less metaphorically, the whole emphasis of the Sufis is on love. On this basic issue the Sufis come closest to the Bauls. In the Baul conception of *Man of My Heart* we may, therefore, find a happy blending of the *sahaja* of the Sahajiyas and the Sufistic conception of the Beloved.

Both the Bauls and the Sufis, in their ecstatic wonder at the expression of the Infinite manifested through the human finite form, have compared it with the movement of an 'unknown bird'. This brings in the concept of *Achin Pakhi* (meaning 'the unknown bird') which is perceived to be playing the eternal game of self-manifestation and of returing once more to itself. The 'unknown bird' or *Achin Pakhi* lives in the cage of the human body for a while, but it soon goes out and floats in the boundless sky. The Baul seeks to capture this mysterious movement in his song.[21]

I wonder how this unknown bird
comes into the cage
and, then, flies out far away.

It is comparable with the Sufi song:[22]

The bird of my heart is a holy bird,
the ninth heaven is its dwelling.

We have already noticed that, like all other Sahajiyas, the Bauls have no faith in places of pilgrimage. But they nevertheless congregate on the occasions of religious festivals. If asked why, the Bauls would say:

We would be within hail of the other boatmen
to hear their calls,
We may, then, make sure
our boat rightly floats
on the *Sahaja* stream.[23]

The Sahajiyas seek the bliss of divine union only for its own sake. The *yoga* of the Bauls, therefore, is essentially different from that of the tantriks who are mainly concerned with various methods of gaining occult and other powers for securing some ulterior ends. Mundane desires appear to be the chief obstacles in the *sahaja* way. However, for getting rid of them, the Bauls do not ask for a total renunciation of

the material objects; but they prefer to concentrate on the opening of the door to the higher self. Kabir says:

I close not my eyes, stop not my ears,
nor torment my body;
But every path I then traverse
becomes a path of pilgrimage,
and whatever work I engage in
becomes service;
This simple consumption is the best.[24]

We have sought to explain how the whole Sahajiya tradition as well the Sufi and the *sant* mysticism have tried to provide an alternative popular philosophy of syncretism opposing the intolerant fundamentalist tenets of institutional orthodoxy of Hinduism and Islam. Was this popular philosophy of syncretism a mere peripheral heretic movement? Rabindranath Tagore did not, however, underestimate the strength of this popular heretic philosophy. In his well-known *Foreword* to Kshitimohan Sen's outstanding work *Mediaeval Mysticism of India*,[25] Tagore wrote: 'India has a *sadhana* of her own and it belongs to her innermost heart. Throughout all her political vicissitudes its stream has flowed on. A wonderful feature of this stream has been that it does not glide along any embankment of scriptural sanctions, and the influence of scholasticism on it, if any, is very small. In fact, this *sadhana* has mostly been unscriptural and not controlled by social laws of any kind. Its spring is within the innermost heart of the people whence it has gushed forth in its spontaneity and broken through the barriers of rules, prescriptive as well as proscriptive. Most of the persons from whose heart this spring has come forth belong to the masses and whatever they have realised and expressed was 'not by means of intellect or much learning of the sacred lore' ('na medhaya na bahuna srutena').

This *sadhana* as indicated earlier, first took concrete shape through the philosophical efforts of Buddhist and Natha Sahajiyas under the Pala rule in Bengal during the period from the eighth century to the eleventh century. The *Charyapadas* and the *Dohas* were the literary expression of the popular Sahajiya philosophy which sought to expose the prevailing pretence of the Brahmanic Hindu orthodoxy. The songs of *Mayanamoti* were another literary expression of the Sahajiya ethos of the same period. However, from the end of the eleventh century till the beginning of the thirteenth century the new ruling of the Senas made an organised attempt to erode the widespread Sahajiya social base in Bengal by imposing the caste-ridden Hindu orthodoxy of northern India. In a sustained opposition to this overbearing trend, the popular Sahajiya tradition of Bengal reasserted itself during the Turk-Afghan and the Mughal periods

stretching over five hundred years from the middle of the thriteenth century till the mid-eighteenth century. During this mediaeval period, the Sahajiya tradition manifested itself in two interconnected streams: the *Saguna* Bhakti movement of the Vaisnavas led by Chaitanyadeva and the *nirguna* Sahajiya movement of the Bauls who were enriched by the interplay of the Sufi philosophy of unorthodox Islam and the mysticism of Kabir and other *sant* poets of northern India.

After the introduction of the British colonial rule in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Sahajiyas in Bengal began to face special problems. The Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century, inspite of its rational heights and firm commitment against religious orthodoxy and fundamentalism, had an urban Hindu elitist bias which could not always appreciate the deep-rooted rural moorings of religious syncretism so long nurtured by the Bauls and other Sahajiyas. The recent research investigations[26] have brought to light the findings that from the middle of the ninetenth century, a large number of people, belonging to both the Hindu low castes and the lower ranks of the Muslim community, began to come out of the domination of Brahmanic Hinduism and Shariati Islam and join the ranks of the Bauls and the Sufi fakirs. The Sahajiya leaders like Lalan Shah, by virtue of their egalitarian approach and pious life style, turned out to be an alternative focus of attraction as opposed to the oppressive brahmins and mullahs. Meanwhile the suppression of the great Sepoy Revolt of 1857–58 was accompanied with the assumption of direct control over the Indian affairs by the British Crown-in-Parliament. As a part of the new comprehensive policy of domination, the colonial rulers decided to initiate moves to divide the united forces of opposition in order to forestall any repetition of the experience of the Sepoy Revolt. Consequently, the British Viceroys and Provincial Governors embarked upon a cynical policy of playing with the Hindu-Muslim religious diversities among the Indians, pitting one community against the other.

It was against this general background that the Bauls of Bengal began to experience organised onslaughts from the orthodox Shariati Islamic leaders in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The maulanas and mullahs concentrated their offensive against the presentation of syncretistic philosophical songs by the Bauls as well as the Sufi fakirs. The Islamic clerics and their armed supporters used to provoke communal tension during the Baul musical performances and occasionally resorted to arson and even murder. The Bengali tract, written by Maulana Riyajuddin Ahmad of Rangpur, was later published under the title of *Baul Dhangsher Fatwa* towards the beginning of the twentieth century (second edition reprinted in 1925). The tract contained explicit instructions given by the Maulana to his orthodox followers to organise militant committees in each district of

Bengal aiming at a ruthless suppression of the Sahajiya Bauls and the Sufi fakirs. Similarly the Hindu orthodox leaders at Calcutta came out with satiric song processions viciously criticizing the Bauls and the fakirs for their syncretistic inclinations.[27] Inspite of all these organised onslaughts, Maulana Riyajuddin's tract admitted that in the early decades of the present century, sixty lakh Bauls were actively engaged in propagating their Sahajiya philosophy through the presentation of songs and dance in the villages of most of the districts of undivided Bengal.

Let us conclude with the incisive observations of Rabindranath Tagore which he made in his introduction to Muhammad Mansuruddin's rare collection of the Baul songs entitled *Haramoni*[28] (meaning 'the lost jewel'): 'The elites in our country who call themselves educated have been exploring tactical measures for Hindu-Muslim amity out of their own compulsions. They have taken the training of history in schools which are alien to us. But the real history of our country bears testimony to the devotion for synthesis which has been shared by the common people as the innermost truth in their emotional depths. This devotion can be located among the Bauls—their syncretistic tradition emerging as a common heritage of both the Hindus and the Muslims who came close without hurting each other. Such a confluence did not end in a meeting or a committee. This blending has produced songs. The language and music of these songs is melodious with a suavity which is untutored and natural. The voices of both Hindus and Muslims have converged to make the songs resonate as a chorus, without giving anybody a chance for provoking a confrontation between the Koran and the Puranas. This confluence is the real reflection of the Indian civilization, while the confrontation exposes the uncivilized edges. The inspiration for the higher process of civilization has been relentlessly at work in the depths of the village *milieu* of Bengal, unnoticed by the institutional educational system of schools and colleges. This innermost inspiration has prepared the basic ground for a common anchorage for both Hindus and Muslims. The Baul songs spring from this deep-rooted anchorage'.

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16. Kshitimohan Sen, op.cit, Appendix IV.
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