

NOTE

THE BAUL TRADITION

Anit Mukerjea writes :

SURVIVING AGAINST the general onslaught of today's degenerate, cacophonous, modern, mainstream musical trends, the folk tradition of Baul still surfaces and, has been kept alive through the persistent efforts of exponents of the genre for nearly three centuries. The popularity of Baul singers who sang and danced to the rhythm and tune of their *ektaras*, initially spread to the rural belts of Bengal. The strong influence of these wandering minstrels managed to trigger off inspiration in Tagore to compose and pen the lyrics of this type of music and vocal renditions.

The villagers were probably moved by the spiritual and philosophical content of the music and lyrics which touched their hearts and souls, its generally melancholic mood reached the pulse of one's emotions and feelings that generates universal appeal. There is a saying that a Baul singer may die but, his song lives on thus, remaining evergreen in the minds of the people. The Baul tradition was initiated by Lalan Fakir sometime in the 19th Century. So strong was its influence that the genre was propagated and perpetuated at the village level by other exponents with a spiritual bent of mind who spoke the truth in expressing the socio-economic and political conditions prevalent at the time by such noted Baul singers of the likes of Kangal Harinath, Jodubindu Fakir, Nuimuddin Fakir et al continued this ethnic culture emerging from such songs of the soil for nearly five centuries. Roots of its ancient origins may be traced to the time of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the 13th Century AD.

Of course, they never shifted base from their native villages, singing mostly in the rural areas and the countryside. Introducing Baul to the urban milieu were Nirmalendu Choudhury, Gosto Gopal and Naboni Das. The latter among the more recognized, was popularly known as Khepa Baul hailed from Birbhum in Labpur village. His son Purnadas Baul popularized the genre and reached out to a global audience. Today, age has caught up with both him and another popular folk and baul singer Amar Pal who may not exude the same energy and vibrancy which spectators witnessed during their prime when they were in better form.

Among the younger generation of baul singers belongs the 59-year-old Sanajit Mondal who has not only kept the baul gharana alive but, in the long run, has received wide recognition not only in India and Bangladesh but, also abroad where he has performed at the Bango Sammelan in the USA and Canada. Sanajit had been at the receiving end of several awards, accolades and citations as was witnessed in his sitting room, his showcase was choked with trophies. The most notable among these was the Mother Teresa International award in 2007 presented by the Governor of Himachal Pradesh J J Singh at the Loreto Convent, Kolkata. □□