

# Theoretical Approach to the Study of an Individual Talent in the Perspective of Contemporary Folkloric Study

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**Abstract—** This article discusses the theoretical approach to studying an individual's talent from the point of view of a contemporary folklore study. People tend to believe that the term "folklore" can only relate to forms verbally transmitted from one generation to the next and that it connects with farmers and the illiterate in society who value literacy. These concepts have been so firmly embedded in people's conceptions of folklore over time that they have merged to form an ingrained tradition that is quite resistant to change. This essay demonstrates how a rudimentary or inadequate understanding of folklore contributed to the development of the custom. In addition, this research aims to clarify the meaning of the term "folklore" and its position in the contemporary world. This article also focuses on the folkloric method of engaging the individual in various academic subjects, such as those we can run into in the field of folklore. The development and improvement of theoretical frameworks for the study of individualistic invention is the primary objective of this research. The researchers of this study have decided to focus on the Bengali mystic and poet Fakir Lalon Shah as an example of an individual talent worthy of examination from the point of view of a contemporary folklore study in the world we live in today. This paper introduces the academic study of folklore and focuses on the theoretical approach to analyzing an individual's talents from the point of view of contemporary folkloric research.

**Keywords—** Contemporary, Folklore, Individual Talent, Study, Theoretical Approach.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Folklore helps us comprehend what is shared by all members of any rural or urban community in the past, present, or future. Of course, this concept exists everywhere in the world. On the site of the Folklore Department at Indiana University, the following idea is presented regarding the terms "folk" and "lore":

Folk can refer to any group of people—from any economic, religious, generational, or ethnic background—who share a common interest. We are all members of folk groups. As a form of communication, folklore is created when people

interact with one another. "Lore" represents the knowledge and artistry of a group in forms such as stories and jokes, art, architecture, music, dance, custom, belief, ritual, and festival. Folklorists reveal the aesthetics and values of people in their everyday lives.

The concept that folklore is only related to individuals who live in rural areas is disproved by the definitions of "folk" and "lore," which undoubtedly provide examples that disprove this misconception. Nobody contests the veracity of the statement:

Peasants were and are, of course, one type of folk, but the point is that they are not the only type of folk. There are many urban folk groups—for example, labor unions, civil rights group and professional athletes—with each of these groups sharing its own specific folk speech, folk beliefs, and other traditions. The shift from defining folk as peasant to folk as a variety of diverse groups, both rural and urban, is an important part of the evolution of international folkloristics (Dundes: 1999: viii).

Folklore serves the objective of being merged with any field related to cultural studies and social sciences, particularly with the departments of language and literature, even if the society we live in today is modern. As the paper's title suggests, it also discusses the subject of an extraordinary person as an illustration of folklore research in the contemporary era. By comparing Anthony Giddens' notion of sociology with that of Marx and Durkheim, the sociology of Anthony Giddens is made clear in *The Constitution of Society*. In terms of the study of folklore in the contemporary world, Giddens' stratification model of the agent is similar to how we approach the role of an individual (Fakir Lalon Shah). The author says that reflexive activity monitoring is a persistent aspect of daily activity that affects the individual and others. He implies that social actors regularly observe the social and physical components of the environment in which they move, in addition to monitoring the flow of their activities and anticipating others to do the same for their own.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Giddens says that the justification of action shows that actors also routinely and for most part without fuss maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their

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activity. In terms of the study of folklore in the contemporary world, Giddens' stratification model of the agent is similar to how we approach the role of an individual talent. Giddens furthers that reflexive activity monitoring is a persistent aspect of daily activity that affects the individual and others. He implies that social actors regularly observe the social and physical components of the environment in which they move, in addition to monitoring the flow of their activities and anticipating others to do the same for their own. Giddens says that the justification of action shows that

actors -- also routinely and for most part without fuss -- maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity. As I have mentioned, having such an understanding should not be equated with the discursive giving of reasons for particular items of conduct, nor even with the capability of specifying such reasons discursively (Giddens: 1984: 35).

This is an individual's conscious action. The mystic poet Fakir Lalon Shah is an individual talent for this study. Giddens appears to generalize social actors' behaviours and deeds. He makes no direct mention of what transpires in the instance of an individual who defies tradition and creates a new one. A creative person's thoughts or any new product will naturally be shared by others in society because Giddens claims that social actors continuously watch the flow of their activities and anticipate that others will do the same. This essay investigates how a remarkable person fits into Bangladesh's societal setting. While listeners create, react to, and reuse music, constituting, as Danielson contends, a music practice, Lalon's heritage has been carried on through the creation, modification, and invention of Bangladeshi listeners. Three groups of listeners can be distinguished: Lalon's admirers, vocalists on radio and television, and regular listeners. Like many ethnographers, we will analyze the dynamics of tradition and creativity and search for parallels and differences between the past and present at various stages. The act of transmission is related to Jennifer Robertson's idea that history is "both a spatiotemporal process and a social production constituting ways in which past is continuously organized, represented, reclaimed, reworked, and reproduced as memory, which may be private or public and popular" in some ways.

There was a time, particularly early in Lalon's practice of Baulism. The alleged Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists did not want Lalon and his followers to sing songs that promoted unity. They caused trouble for the Bauls, physically and mentally, because Baulism is opposed to formal religion. According to Dimock, baulism is:

Man is the microcosm, containing the divine and all the elements of truth within himself. Realization of the divine means realization of the one's own true nature (Dimock :1989: 91).

### III. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The study's overarching goal is to provide a theoretical framework for investigating exceptional talent from the perspective of modern folkloristic research.

### IV. METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

This work aims to examine, from the perspective of contemporary folklore research, the theoretical approach to studying individual talent. The research paper presented here is coordination between Lalon Shah's life events and field-based investigation. Through interviews with Lalon admirers, the researchers have compiled information to use in our exploration of Lalon Shah's distinctive invention. It has attempted to show how the custom developed due to a superficial or insufficient grasp of folklore with the following questions:

- a. Why could Fakir Lalon Shah get nearly every Bengali - affluent or poor, ignorant or educated - to listen to his songs? This is how this topic has been addressed.
- b. What made Bengali Bauls like Lalon, among many others, so significant in their songs, ideologies, and religion?
- c. How did he interact with society and break down social barriers?

Lalon, a Bengali mystic poet who was raised in a nonsectarian community, is a representative of Bengali culture. Lalon attempted to change Bengali culture through his satire of bad actors, crimes, and flaws. This research relates to Lalon's life narrative, the development of a tradition of his poetic philosophy, its evolution over time, and its transcendence.

It also tries to put folklore's definition and place in the modern world in the proper context. This paper gives significance to the theoretical approach to the study of an individual talent in the perspective of a contemporary folkloric study. Thus, the main goal of this research is to establish and advance theoretical frameworks for studying an individual talent. To fulfil the objective of this study, the researchers have taken the Bengali mystic poet Fakir Lalon Shah as an example of the theoretical approach to the study of an individual talent in the perspective of a contemporary folkloric study.

### V. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

Lalon's relationship with society is an instance of Niedermuller's theory that "individual life histories contain not simply the particular events of the life of a single individual but much rather the picture of a community, society, or historical situation filtered through the texture of individual life."<sup>1</sup> Lalon, as an individual, took a stand against the conservative society and its inhumanity. It will become apparent that his songs convey his revolutionary attitude towards the community's feelings. Lalon moved away from his family when he was in the middle of his teenage years, and he did so with many unanswered questions about life, religion, God, and the world. He discovered the solutions through the guidance of his Guru,

Seraj Shah, an experienced and knowledgeable spiritual practitioner. Lalon's Guru, Seraj Shah, introduced him to the Baul doctrine and initiated him into its practice. After Lalon was initiated into the Baul tradition by Seraj Shah, he no longer had any interest in the organized practices of religion (Chowdhury: 1990: 14). Lalon, who was being instructed in Baulism by his Guru, Seraj Shah, was given the order in 1823 to construct a home for the practice of Baulism in the village of Siurya, which is located in the district of Kushtia (Choudhury: 1990: 15). In the beginning, he devoted himself to ascetic practice deep within the dense forest surrounding the village of Siurya. He did this while sitting beneath a massive mango tree. The people living in Siurya eventually developed an affection for him.

Later on, the local community of craftsmen assisted him in creating an environment that was conducive to the practice of Baulism in Siurya. This was made possible because nearly all of the villagers in Siurya were artisans. His former neighbours in the artisan community used to have a great deal of affection and respect for him, and almost all of them eventually became devotees of Lalon's. "It wasn't long after he began practising Baul in Siurya that he changed his name to Baul Fakir Lalon Shah, and word of his teachings quickly spread throughout the region. He became known throughout Bengal as the foremost Baul Guru in the region (Chowdhury: 1990: 15). Annada Shanker Roy made a reference to the Hitakari Journal in his book that was published in 1992. In the Hitakari Journal, we learn that Lalon did not want his dead body to be buried following the rituals of any particular religion (Roy: 1992: 2).

Before his passing away, Lalon requested that his body be interred in the house's backyard, where he had performed rituals in the past. As long as Bengali Muslims maintain their predominance in Bangladesh, there is no question that discussions regarding this matter will continue to be a source of contention there. This is in line with what Robertson has said, which is that "the form of hegemony lies in the power to master signs of styles and periods, the ability to read/construct 'codes of distinction'... order and power do not have to be imposed, or authored, but are already embodied in the very order of objects as they are presented" (Robertson :1994: 18).

There is no distinction between Hindus, Muslims, high castes, and low castes in Lalon Fakir's eyes because he believes that everyone is just a traveller on the path to God. Lalon Fakir does not acknowledge any social or religious divisions that exist among human beings (Dimock: 1989: 75). When the following statement is found in the book written by Annada Shangker Roy, it is an introductory statement regarding how the people of various communities accepted Lalon:

Lalon was well accepted by the Muslims because of his eating and behaving as same as the Muslims do. The Vaisnavs loved him because his opinion seemed very much similar to Vaisnavism. It is no wonder to consider him a Bramho for he seemed to believe in one creator and treated equally all people from different communities (Roy: 1992: 2). Abu Rushd comments that his songs reveal Lalon Shah's familiarity with Hinduism and Christianity as well as with

Islam. (Rushd: 1964: i)

Lalon has significantly contributed to fostering good relations between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh. Many years before Bangladesh became an independent country, Lalon advocated nonsectarian values through his poetry in Bengal. Lalon Fakir, both directly and indirectly, aimed to create the friendship between Hindus and Muslims that exists now. The human body serves as a temple for the genuine self, which is the manifestation of ultimate reality.

The people in the audience would follow him whenever he sang. Even today, in 2023, Lalon's songs are being frequently reconsidered, and this reconsideration is steadily growing among his followers. This procedure makes us think of the practice theory that Virginia Danielson employed in *The Voice of Egypt* as one of the most effective methods for doing her ethnographic research of Umm Kulthum. Virginia Danielson cites an argument made by Richard Middleton: "Listener's interpretations connect with their attempts "to make sense of a changing world in terms of past experience" (Middleton: 1998: 6).

What occurs with Lalon's songs gives us an understanding of this process, which involves how his songs were heard, understood, reinterpreted, and reproduced. Songs by Lalon are transmitted by listening, speaking, and repetition. The process talks about the past, and the future is envisioned through history, present, and future relationships. The production is received and replicated by the listeners. Following Lalon Fakir's passing, his followers tried to continue his tradition exactly like Lalon's. Lalon Fakir's relationship with his followers is comparable to that of a guru and a shisha (teacher and disciples). His followers were taught Lalon's songs and their guru Lalon Fakir's way of life, beliefs, and practices in secret.

Nobel laureate Rabindranath said in the Foreword to *Haramoni*:<sup>2</sup>

I have expressed my love toward the Baul songs in many of my writing. When I was in Silaidaha I would frequently meet these Bauls, and I had occasion to have discourse with them (Dimock: 1989:73).

Lalon's songs have a primarily oral heritage, but over time, many of the texts have been recorded by his admirers, lovers, scholars, and Rabindranath Tagore. Lalon Fakir produced more than ten thousand songs, but neither he nor his followers wanted to record their creations. It was his intention to sing the songs whenever they came to him. Lalon sang and played the one-stringed *ektara* for his followers. The primary method of support for Lalon's followers was memorization. Although the tradition is dynamic and changeable, repetition and memory are the desired outcomes for some genres and populations. Folklorists emphasize transmission and join the makers in conceiving traditions as things are passed down from generation to generation due to these circumstances (Glassie: 1995: 407). The followers of Lalon who reside on the campus of Lalon's Mazar assert that they uphold Lalon's traditions because they were initiated by their Guru (teacher). On the

other hand, singers on the radio, television, and other professional vocalists appear to sing Lalon's songs differently than his devotees. As a result, the issue calls into question its veracity. There are two types of Lalon singers, according to Annanda Sangkar Roy, and those who reside on the campus of Lalon's Mazar claim to sing his songs adequately, while those who live outside of the Mazar follow an another, less correct method (Roy: 1992: ii). We also want to consider another set of vocalists who are neither Lalon's followers nor professionals. Although the members of this ensemble are not well-known singers, they regularly perform parts of or entire songs as part of their daily activities. Many of our close friends and family members spontaneously perform Lalon's songs are sung in whole or in part without using an instrument at any given time or location. Glassie's assertion aids in our understanding of tradition:

Accept, to begin, that tradition is the creation of the future out of the past. A continuous process situated in the nothingness of the present, linking the vanished with the unknown, tradition is stopped, parceled, and codified by preoccupations, and leave us with a scatter of apparently contradictory, yet cogent, definitions. (Glassie: 1995: 395).

Utilizing this idea, the radio and television performers also demonstrate the Lalon tradition's persistence in the face of some changes. The songs' pitches and melodies are partially altered, but they produce a type of music with contemporary songs' feel. The disciples of Lalon receive their initiation from their Guru and adhere to their Guru's teachings. In addition, being taught how to sing orally and present songs, they are also taught how to love people and devote themselves to their Guru. Although there are differences between Lalon's followers and radio and television performers, both groups are working to keep the music alive. The third category of vocalists we indicated includes those who are neither Lalon's fans nor radio or television performers but sing the songs that Lalon has created. Also, Lalon's music is surviving through a third channel, this one, according to Ellen J. Stekert, four kinds of "folksingers" or "singers of folksongs" held power. These classifications were cited by Georges & Jones and appear consistent with the interpretation. Those who grew up learning their tunes and style orally.... hybridized vocal and instrumental folk, classical, jazz, and pop genres to produce a fresh aesthetic (Georges & Jones: 1995: 82).

Accordingly, this is somewhat related to Jun Jing's statement that "the viewpoint and behavior of those who grow up within these communities are indelibly shaped by a process of learning about their past through a myriad of oral, written, and performative media" (Jing: 1995: 18). Lalon's songs, known for their mysticism, lovely tuning, and philosophical meaning, are becoming increasingly well-liked both domestically and internationally, making Fakir Rob extremely happy. Fakir Rob enjoys all of Lalon's songs. Still, his favourite is: "Everyone Knows Who Are Human Beings With Different Castes/But Who Knows the Real Man? "Love for mankind has been referred to as "loving people is the best policy/Love for man can deliver the highest rewards."

## VI. CONCLUSION

The approach of this study to numerous significant events that occurred during Lalon's life provides historical knowledge of Lalon's career at various phases of his life, both as a philosopher and as a musician in the context of the social and cultural environment in which he operated. The occurrences in Lalon's life have provided the context necessary for us to examine his interaction with society. Not only is Lalon important for the love and equity philosophy that he espoused, but he is also significant for his role in developing Bengali nationalism. Lalon's efforts to reconcile Bengal's Muslim and Hindu communities are commendable, as Bengali nationalism is an expression of solidarity between the two religious' groups. Lalon was born into traditional Bengali society, but he was able to defy the social and cultural norms of his community. His music makes amends for the wrongdoing; it eradicates the dishonesty, meanness, and divides that have occurred. As a result, he is a social reformer. Lalon is not just a person but also a social and cultural representation of his people. He envisioned a society not divided along religious lines, and he founded an autonomous tradition. He instils in us the values of solidarity, love, and fairness. His voice is against the anarchy and chaos that pervades the modern world, and he is the voice that represents the voice of humankind as a whole. To conclude, the Bengali mystic poet Fakir Lalon Shah stands out as an individual talent when viewed through the lens of contemporary folkloristic study.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Niedermuller, Peter. 1988. "From the Stories of Life to the Life History: Historic Context, Social Process, and the Biographical Method," in *Life History as Cultural Construction/Performance: Proceedings of the IIIrd American-Hungarian Folklore Conference*. P. 463.

<sup>2</sup> Rabindranath won Nobel Prize in 1913. He wrote Gitanjali, which is the title of Rabindranath's profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West.

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