

RESEARCH REPORT

COOPTATION OF THE HETERODOX FAKIRS IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH

Mohammad Golam Nabi Mozumder

June 2019

**BANGLADESH INSTITUTE OF
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

Research Report No. 190

Mohammad Golam Nabi Mozumder

Research Associate

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

Dhaka

Published by

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

E-17, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar

G.P.O. Box No. 3854, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

Phone: 9143441-8

FAX: 880-2-8141722

Website: www.bids.org.bd

E-mail: publication@bids.org.bd

@ Copyright BIDS, June 2019

Price: Inland
Tk. 80.00

Foreign
US\$ 10.00

This Research Report has been set in Times New Roman by Md. Ahshan Ullah Bahar,
Publication Assistant, BIDS, Printed at Dot Printing and Packaging.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2	4
METHODOLOGY	4
CHAPTER 3	6
FINDINGS	6
3.1 Fakirs Appear Foreign at Home	6
3.2 Popularity Accompanies Anxiety	13
3.3 Living Tradition turns into a Cultural Heritage	18
CHAPTER 4	21
COOPTATION	21
CHAPTER 5	24
CONCLUSION	24
5.1 Policy Recommendations	26

List of Figures

Figure 3.1: A Few Fakirs in the Middle Surrounded by Visitors Inside Lalon Complex	9
Figure 3.2: Performing Fakirs at Lalon’s <i>dham</i>	10
Figure 3.3: State Sponsored Cultural Program in Cheuria, Kushtia	11
Figure 3.4: Thousands of Attendees at the State-Sponsored Parallel Cultural Program.....	12
Figure 3.5: Celebrated Singer Momtaj Performing in Cheuria, Kushtia	14
Figure 3.6: The Removed Image of a Group of Fakirs in Conversation.....	15

Abstract

This study examines how the interventions of the state and non-state apparatus (re)shape the spiritual landscape of the unorthodox Bauls, specifically Fakirs, in contemporary Bangladesh. I conducted an ethnographic study with the followers of Fakir Lalon Shah (1890). The main argument of the paper is that despite the apparent intention of assisting the initiates, Fakirs' heterodox life-practices have been gradually coopted by the public authorities (by co-organizing the rituals at the most important site of the initiates, i.e., Lalon's dham in Cheuria, Kushtia), local media (by highlighting non-ritualistic performances of Lalon's songs and marginalizing the actual practitioners), and dominant civil society stakeholders (by calling for preserving the tradition as a local heritage). Moreover, this paper explains why the popularity of Lalon's songs often comes at the cost of a life-long commitment to the spiritual praxis. Considering the findings of the study, policymakers may be recommended to ensure that heterodox, marginal groups such as Fakirs are allowed sufficient freedom to cultivate their alternative life-praxis. Furthermore, to promote cultural diversity, Bangladesh needs to nurture (not coopt) the insights and wisdom of the Fakirs.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890)—who was reportedly rescued as severely infected with chicken pox and left alone on the brink of the Kaliganga river in Cheuria, Kushtia (Choudhury 2009a: 11-14)—eventually became not only the most influential ‘mystic minstrel’ in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India but also the central figure of one of the most popular spiritual traditions in contemporary Bangladesh. Despite having no formal education, he composed around five hundred songs, which are simple but thought-provoking (Choudhury 2009b, Das 1958, Rafiuddin 2009). Lalon left more than ten thousand followers (Hitokori 1890). As did Lalon, his followers known as Fakirs (most of whom are poor and village dwellers) sing songs typically with the one-stringed ‘*Ektara*,’ practice religious harmony, and preach somatic divinity—every human being, regardless of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, or religion, is an expression of the embodiment of God (Author). Fakirs are known for their ‘esoteric and ascetic’ practices, for example, of a Guru-led training of the self to realize the presumably innate divinity of the body (Cakrabarti 1992, Jha 2008, Openshaw 2002, Sharif 2009). Fakirs are small in number (Choudhury 2009b). No census has yet been made of them. But their influence in the cultural spheres of Bangladesh is significant (Sharif 2009). Thousands of people including urban, educated people attend the two annual gatherings namely *Dol Utsob* and *Tirodhan Dibosh* at the *dham* (sacred site) of Lalon.¹ During the events, the attendees perform ritual prayers and sing songs. Reports on the events are often highlighted by local television channels, radio stations, and newspapers.

As part of their heterodox life-practices, Fakirs invert gender hierarchy (Knight 2011; McDaniel 1992), violate caste purity and hierarchy, venerate the ‘Simple Human Being’ as God, and ritually use bodily secretions, popularly known as ‘the four moon practice’ (Cakrabarti 1989, Jha 1995, 2010, Openshaw 2002). Not surprisingly, there has been social outcry surrounding their unorthodox practices. Practitioners are initiated by a Guru; they perform the prescribed spiritual praxis of Lalon. To clarify, generally three categories of people constitute the community of Fakirs: Gurus, disciples/devotees, and well-wishers. Gurus are the spiritual masters who guide the practitioners to become a Fakir. A devotee or disciple is someone who is formally initiated by a Guru to perform the rituals. And well-wishers are general enthusiasts who often visit the *akhras*, listen to the songs sung by Fakirs, participate

¹ A local newspaper, *The Daily Star*, reported on one of most important the annual events in Kushtia (<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/3-day-lalon-festival-begins-1542247>). Here is another report published by a local vernacular daily newspaper, *Ittefaq*, on *Dol Utsob* in 2014: <http://archive.ittefaq.com.bd/index.php?ref=MjBfMDNfMTIfMTRfMV8yXzFfMTE2ODc1>

the weekly gatherings (typically during Friday evenings), and often financially contribute to help practitioners organize events such as *sadhusangas*. To find a safe place to practice the unorthodox rituals, Fakirs usually choose to live in relatively remote areas of villages across the country. Moreover, as the practitioners willingly withdraw themselves from the mainstream society, Fakirs become vulnerable to misconduct, humiliation, and often verbal abuse and physical harassment. They are sometimes beaten up and cast out. A local newspaper, *The Daily Star*, reported on 31 July 2016 that:

unidentified criminals assaulted two bauls and set fire to their Akhra at a remote village in Chuadanga yesterday, less than two weeks after four bauls had been attacked and injured in the district.

[-] criminals tie them [the Bauls] up, cut their hair, burn down their abode.²

Fakirs are disliked both by some Hindus and Muslims (Das 1992: 82-83; Jha 2002). Chowdhury (2009b: 987-995) recorded how some of the prominent writers in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Moulabhi Abdul Wali, Munshi Emdad Ali, and Moulana Akram Kha, blamed the Bauls, specifically Lalon and his followers, as anti-Islamic.

Although Fakirs form a minority group, their songs are popular both in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. Thousands of people attend their performances during the annual ritual gatherings in Cheuria, Kushtia at Lalon's *dham*. Understandably, they attract the attention of both the mass media and public authorities. Similarly, in West Bengal, India, 'as a result of the increasingly gentrified and globalized society, members of the upper-middle class residing in the cities started acting as patrons of Baul music' (Lorea 2014: 87). The attention of the wider audience has brought both troubles and opportunities for the practitioners. While Fakirs have been regularly featured by newspapers and television channels, the public authorities have gradually strengthened their influence on Fakirs, particularly in managing the two annual events at Lalon's *dham*, which essentially ended the exclusive control of the Gurus over the management of the site. This paper examines how the interventions of the public authorities, media, and civil society (re)shape the spiritual landscape of the unorthodox Fakirs. I argue that, to their dissatisfaction, Fakirs' heterodox life-practices have been gradually coopted by the public authorities (by co-managing the sites and administering annual observances), commercial mass media (by promoting noninitiated singers), and dominant civil society stakeholders (for example, by calling for preservation of the tradition as a

² '2 bauls assaulted in Chuadanga,' a report published by *the Daily Star*, accessed on March 7, 2018 from here: <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/2-bauls-assaulted-chuadanga-1262032>

local heritage). However, the involvement of local administration in organizing the annual programs helps Fakirs maintain law and order at the site, facilitate direct communications between the practitioners and members of civil society and the government, and secure public funding for the events.

By cooptation I refer to the process where ‘the concept itself is not rejected, but its initial meaning is transformed and used in the policy discourse for a different purpose than the original one’ (Stratigaki 2004: 36). In this case, legitimacy of the Fakirs’ practices is not questioned; instead, the spirituality and devotion that are essential in performing those rituals are marginalized. Coy and Hedeem (2005) identified two seminal features of cooptation process by reviewing Gamson (1969), Lacy (1982), and Selznick (1949). The features are: Conflict between a powerful and a relatively less powerful group, and a threat involved. In the Fakirs’ case, one of the risks of the conflict between the initiates and the powerful authorities is the potential loss of the practitioners’ exclusive control over their most sacred place—Lalon’s *dham* in Kushtia. Cooptation in some cases can serve the interests of both parties involved in a conflict. Grassroot-level political organizers, for example, coopt the Internet technology by creating virtual forums, such as Democratic Underground, Free Republic, Indymedia, and Move On, to counter the global and local corporate interest groups (Pickard 2008). Conversely, a mainstream media—Cable News Network (CNN)—coopted an important tool of citizen journalism by creating i-Report—‘a user-generated citizen news site’ (Kperogi 2011). For the heterodox Fakirs, however, the apparent gain has come at the cost of the long-term waning of the spiritual strength.

This study is expected to contribute to developing a better understanding of the praxis of Fakirs among the people of Bangladesh in general. More importantly, this study reinforces the need for effective cooperation between the followers of Lalon, on the one hand, and the local/national authorities/institutions, on the other. However, instead of limiting the possibilities of practicing a heterodox praxis or coopting such practices, it should create the conditions needed for strengthening cultural diversity.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the research consists of three components: Participant observation, in-depth interview, and content analysis. I focused mainly on the three important Gurus: Nohir Fakir, Rowshan Fakir, and Shamsul Fakir. I also interviewed Ridoy Fakir, who is one of the few educated practitioners that I have come to know. He is actively involved in organizing the annual gatherings at Lalon's *dham* in Cheuria, Kushtia. In addition, I visited the *asram* of Fakir Doulat Shah (who is the Guru of Hridoy Fakir) and interviewed him by staying at his *asram* in Fatehpur, Meherpur. Instead of relying on a structured checklist, I remained open in asking questions related to their everyday practices, ritual gatherings, Guru-disciple relationship, and relationship with the broader community and local authorities who usually play a significant role in organizing major events at Lalon's *dham* in Cheuria. Furthermore, I analyzed selected newspaper reports on the annual ritual gatherings at Lalon's *dham*. As I was also a participant of a similar event in 2014, I compare the newspaper reports on the important event with my own experience. I analyzed the reports on the annual events held from 2014 to 2017, published by three prominent local daily newspapers: *Prothom-Alo*, *Ittefaq*, and *The Daily Star*. However, the analyses of the newspaper reports may not be generalizable but are indicative of important patterns.

As part of an ethnographic study, I stayed at *akhras* (Fakirs' dwelling and practicing places) in the remote villages of Kushtia and Meherpur districts from June to October 2014. I also attended the annual ritual gathering of the Fakirs on 124th anniversary of Lalon's '*tirodhan*' ('disappearance') held from 16 to 20 October 2014 in Cheuria, Kushtia. In November and December 2017, I conducted another round of interviews. I draw on my experience of attending the ritual gatherings of the Fakirs in Cheuria, Kushtia, on the anniversary of Lalon's '*tirodhan*' ('disappearance'), which is regularly held on the 1st day of the Bengali month of *Kartik*. In 2014, the ritual gathering started on 16th October and continued for five days. In addition, I used newspaper reports on the programs on 127th anniversary of Lalon's *tirodhan* held from 16 to 18 October 2017.

While living with the practitioners, I witnessed how the followers of Lalon appreciate the government's initiatives in protecting the Fakirs from possible attacks by dogmatists. However, Gurus express dissatisfaction about the undue interference of the government in managing Lalon's *dham*, where the annual gatherings take place. While Fakirs welcome the growing interest of educated youth to Lalon's songs, they are concerned about the waning commitment to Fakirs' spiritual praxis.

Gurus appreciate the increasing attendance of people on different occasions, such as the anniversary of Lalon's *tirodhan* (disappearance). However, they are unhappy about the lack of congenial atmosphere for performing rituals at Lalon's *dham* during those occasions, and the paucity of devotion among the attendees.

This report is organized as follows. After the introductory statements in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the methodology. Chapter 3 discusses the findings. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section investigates how the local government authorities have taken away the exclusive right of Fakirs to manage the most sacred site, Lalon's *dham*. Lack of management rights also means that Fakirs no longer have the sole authority to decide how to accommodate non-initiate attendees in the ritualistic programs and how to maintain a congenial atmosphere at the site considered to be sacred. Also, this section shows how one of the annual ritual gatherings appears to be a conventional cultural program or a festival, where people from different classes entertain themselves by listening to music, watching the decorated site, shopping around, eating together, or by just being part of the crowd. The second section highlights how the increasing popularity of Fakirs, specifically Lalon's songs, accompanies decreasing interest of general enthusiasts to become initiated disciples of Gurus and committing to the life-long praxis, specifically focuses on why popular performers of Lalon's songs tend to be reluctant, if not unwilling, to submit themselves to a Guru and become practitioners. Even if some get initiated by a Guru to be a *bhakta* (devotee) but majority of them fail to perform the rituals regularly with sincere devotion to becoming a Fakir. And the latest expression of that apathy towards becoming devout practitioners is the tendency among young enthusiasts to turn into 'soukhin [amateur] Bauls.' The final section examines how a group of intellectuals, researchers, and poets have attempted to popularize Lalon's songs among non-initiate youth as part of an initiative to preserve Baul tradition as a cultural heritage. With the sponsorship of UNESCO, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy—one of the cultural wings of the government of Bangladesh—coordinated the initiative.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

3.1 Fakirs Appear Foreign at Home

In this section I discuss two aspects of the Fakirs appearing foreign at home. First, I focus on how the practitioners lost their exclusive authority over managing Lalon's *dham* (sacred site). Then I show how the local government authorities coopt the heterodox practitioners by organizing popular cultural programs simultaneously with the Fakirs' ritual gatherings at an open field adjacent to Lalon's *dham*.

Lalon's *akhra* in Cheuria, Kushtia, had been managed solely by the practicing Fakirs. Soon after Lalon's *tirodhan* in 1890, Fakirs formed a committee named *Lalon Mazar O Seba Sadan Rakkha Committee* (Committee for Protecting Lalon's Shrine and the Serving Site) to manage the two annual events at Lalon's *dham*. However, in 1984, a local government official considered Fakirs' practices non-Islamic and eventually ordered the initiates to evacuate the place.

On October 17, 1984, [the] district administration organised a meeting at Lalon Mazar [shrine] and the then DC [Deputy Commissioner] "urged" Bauls to return to the path of Islamic "Shariah" from the "non-Shariah" way of life by committing Tawba (a kind of confession through Islam). The DC also ordered the Bauls to stop singing the Lalon songs. (Aman 2011)

The Fakirs refused to leave their most important spiritual space (Masahiko 2013), and it has had severe consequences for the initiates. Fakirs were severely beaten by the police and forced to desert the presumed sacred site. Many of the Fakirs were injured, and one of them, Birat Shah, died of the injuries several days later. Under the banner of *Lalon Mazar O Seba Sadan Rakkha Committee*, senior Gurus led by Fakir Mantu Shah then waged a unified movement against the interventions of the public authorities at Lalon's *dham*. Since then the Fakirs have been in an uneasy relationship with the local authorities and the state. On behalf of Fakirs, Mantu Shah filed a lawsuit against the government and the concerned authorities. Although the court gave the final verdict in favor of Fakirs, the verdict has never been implemented. Instead, in 1997, the then government announced its plan to build 'a 4-story research building with a library and museum, a music hall, and a guesthouse' (Masahiko 2013: 7) beside Lalon's *dham*. To protest the unwanted interventions of the government, members of civil society formed a national committee in the capital city, Dhaka. The committee included the late National Poet Shamsur Rahman and several prominent university professors, including Serajul Islam Choudhury. Despite the outcry, the government eventually completed the construction of the building,

adding wounds to the already aggrieved Fakirs. Since then the Fakirs have become alienated in their own home, as the local government continued to intervene and influence the ritualistic events of the initiates at their most important site.

Key Points – I

- 1890 – Fakirs formed Lalon Mazar O Seba Sadan Rakkha Committee (Committee for Protecting Lalon’s Shrine and the Serving Site) to manage Lalon’s dham
- 1984 – Local DC blamed Fakirs as non-Islamic; Police charged and Fakir Birat Shah died
- Fakir Mantu Shah sued the government; the Court finally ruled against the interventions of the government
- 1997 – the then government announced building a 4-storied building named Lalon Complex
- 2011 – Fakir Montu Shah died
- Lalon Academy Karjokori Porishod [The Executive Council of Lalon Academy] led by the District Commissioner of Kushtia formed to oversee the events at the dham

On 16 October 2014, in the evening, I traveled from Dhaka to Cheuria, Kushtia to attend one of the two biggest ritual gatherings of the Fakirs, named Lalon’s *tirodhan dibosh* (the day of ‘disappearance’). It is interesting to note that the Fakirs do not say ‘Lalon died’. The word, *tirodhan*, instead reflects their understanding of life and death not as beginning or ending but a transition from one phase to another. They also seem to believe in reincarnation. While I was heading towards the site, I noticed from the entry point the entire site was packed with people of all ages. When I was about half a kilometer away from the site, I saw the various makeshift stores on the sideways selling foods, musical instruments, books, and toys. While trying to enter the site itself, right from the main gate it was so crowded at times I had to literally push people to make my way into the building complex. As the vendors on both sides of the street occupied the sidewalks of the relatively narrow entry, the visitors including myself moved in and out of the site usually by forming single-file lines. Hundreds, if not thousands of people, had to rub shoulders to move around. There was almost no empty space inside. Following the crowd, I was finally able to enter. I immediately noticed, there were two sides of the gatherings. On the left side

of the entry point, I saw the famous site where Lalon was buried. Right beside that there was a white building, the first floor of which was literally packed with people. One could notice only a small number of people wearing white garments, the Fakirs, sitting in circles. The circles of the Fakirs were surrounded by numerous visitors. It was surprising to observe only a small number of white-dressed Gurus in the middle who were the main attractions of the event.

The entire building was decorated with colorful lights. There were two buildings inside the area. The leftmost building, which includes a museum, was constructed by the local government. The building in the middle at which the Fakirs were sitting. During the gathering, I noticed some Fakirs, including Fakir Doulat Shah, found a place to sit on the corridor of the museum. Fakir Nohir Shah had sent his disciples three days before the event to make sure he had a place to sit in the main building, which was right beside Lalon's burial site. When I entered in this part of the area following the trail, I noticed that there was a small site in front of the big building. That small site was where Lalon's shrine was located. Right beside Lalon's grave, the female spiritual guide of Lalon, Motijan Bibi, was buried. People entered there and kissed the tomb on the side to show their love and respect to the presumably sacred souls. Many of the visitors also prayed for Lalon's blessings. Most of the visitors that I observed were non-initiates. Many of them came from a distant place. Another notable aspect of the gathering is the attendance of people loosely labelled as Baul. Some of them were wearing ochre robes, which is not the preferred dress of the followers of Lalon. Some of them were followers of Sufi traditions, and some others belonged to Vaishnavism. Many others following diverse spiritual traditions came to the site on the occasion. Some of them wearing ochre robe sat in the two sides of the entry road, making the site appear diverse, lively, and friendly.

Once I entered the building, I noticed the Fakirs were surrounded by numerous visitors; the practitioners were performing Lalon's songs one by one. Many of their disciples came and kissed their Guru's feet ritually. Some of them participated in the discussions on Lalon's songs and other spiritual practices. Once again it was noticeable that a few Gurus sitting in the middle were accompanied by a handful of disciples. Noticeably, visitors were constantly pouring into the building to see the white-dressed, singing Fakirs. Visitors typically spent a few minutes standing beside a group of Fakirs and listened to their performance before moving to explore another group of practitioners. In that constant movement of visitors inside the heavily crowded space, Fakirs at times felt trapped. While conversing with me at the site, Shamsul Fakir expressed his frustration and suggested the authorities should think about managing the crowd in a way so that the practitioners staying inside the building could perform their rituals without such an overwhelming and continuous flow of non-initiate visitors.

Figure 3.1: A Few Fakirs in the Middle Surrounded by Visitors Inside Lalon Complex



Visitors inside the building literally surrounded the few practicing Fakirs sitting on the floor (Figure 3.1). The Fakirs were both happy and worried about the presence of the overwhelming number of attendees at the event. While the Fakirs often felt happy about the interest of numerous people in Fakir Lalon and his followers, the practitioners were worried that they often lacked the proper milieu of practicing the rituals. Physical proximity and close interaction between Fakirs and the visitors are important in their culture. Fakirs need physical proximity to be able to interact, talk, and discuss various issues related to their spiritual life. In addition, initiates and visitors bow before a Guru, and the Guru in turn places his/her hands on the head of a visitor. I observed that the key components of a typical relationship between a Guru and devotees, i.e., relative quietness and lengthy interactions, were virtually impossible in that setting.

Figure 3.2: Performing Fakirs at Lalon's *dham*



Hridoy Fakir and his team were performing Lalon's songs within the building (Figure 3.2). A few things are important to note here. While it is typical for the Fakirs to sing songs at the site during the gatherings, the presence of live TV cameras is not. Hridoy Fakir told me that the performances of his group were broadcast live on a national television channel. Hridoy Fakir himself is a college graduate and former employee of a private company. He has close contacts with journalists working for both newspapers and television channels. He managed to live broadcast his performances. Hridoy Fakir is one exceptional practitioner who left his managerial job and became an initiate. Given his educational qualification and social status as a former corporate employee, Hridoy Fakir has developed a good relationship with the local public authorities, the members of annual observances organizing committee, and local and national newspaper and TV journalists. He once told me about his vision, 'We want to create a new trend among the Bauls by attracting educated youth to the practices of Fakir Lalon.' According to him, many of the practitioners do not know why their practices are important. He then said, 'I can scientifically explain to you why all of the things we do are important.' He continued by showing that he wore *khrom*—a specific type of shoes made of wood that was believed to be used by Lalon. Hridoy Fakir insisted that all the Fakirs should wear only *khrom* and avoid any other types of shoes. While he seemed to stick to orthodoxies, Hridoy Fakir is remarkably proactive in giving interviews at TV channels or newspapers. Hridoy Fakir also told me that he helped making a

documentary on Lalon's *dham* named *Hoker Ghor*, which focuses on how the public authorities have essentially replaced the Fakirs in managing the most important site of the practitioners.

The Fakirs' *Seba Sadan* Committee had been organizing the events at Lalon's *dham* for decades, but the local district officials, on behalf of Lalon Academy, gradually exerted more influence over the annual events at the site. The last active leader of the Fakirs' committee was Fakir Montu Shah, who died in 2011. In absence of any effective leadership of the Fakirs, the local government authorities have become a *de facto* authority. A separate committee led by local Deputy Commissioner started organizing parallel cultural programs in an open field adjacent to Lalon's *dham*.

Figure 3.3: State Sponsored Cultural Programme in Cheuria, Kushtia



On the right side of the main road at the entrance of Lalon's *dham*, there is a huge open field at which the state-sponsored parallel cultural program is usually held. When I first saw the stage in that field with thousands of people in front of the stage (Figures 3.3 and 3.4), I wondered if that would be a different program. It was the state-sponsored program organized on Lalon's *tirodhan*. The program was organized by a committee named *Lalon Academy Karjokori Porishod* [The

Executive Council of Lalon Academy]. The committee is always led by local District Commissioner. The events typically include speeches by local government representatives, sometimes ministers, scholars, and public intellectuals; and performances of popular singers. What makes the program widely popular is the live performances of famous singers. That is one reason local television channels often show video clips of the performances of those famous singers.

Figure 3.4: Thousands of Attendees at the State-Sponsored Parallel Cultural Program



Though the popular stage indicates a growing popularity of the Fakirs among the mass people, Fakirs often worry about their important ritual gatherings being turned into conventional cultural programs. The few practitioners sitting inside the building looked like the main attraction of a popular exhibition. On the other hand, the huge stage, the presence of popular singers, and government officials tend to divert the attention of the mass people more into the popular version of Fakirs' practices. The Fakirs, specifically Lalon, are undoubtedly more popular among the people of Bangladesh now-a-days, but the popularity has come at a cost: lack of interest in actual spiritual praxis. The number of people appreciating Lalon's songs has been apparently soaring in contemporary Bangladesh, but few have become practitioners. Hridoy Fakir remarked:

this time [in October 2017] there were enough crowd [at the annual gathering at Lalon's dham]. So many people showed up that attendees had to spread polyethylene sheets on the narrow streets besides Lalon Shah's [dham] to stay. The number of people attended the program has increased enormously; there were no such gatherings within last six-seven years.

Furthermore, something rarely seen in the past has been happening in recent times: University educated youth such as a journalist of the leading vernacular newspaper, a promising filmmaker, and a former employee of a private company have become disciples. However, Hridoy Fakir expressed his concern about the presumed lack of sincere and wise Sadhus in his times. Sadhus also generally complain about the lack of sincerity and devotion among the novices. They are also worried about the commercialization of the supposedly spiritual musical performances. As Rowshan Fakir lamented, among his disciples almost none of them would possibly excel in earning *Khilka* (to be recognized as an accomplished Fakir). The scholar practitioner, Farhad Mazhar, predicted that ‘this current form [of Fakirs’ praxis] will not last; this will be gone. And it will not be surprising.’ However, Lalon’s philosophy has generated certain forms of intellectual activism by both criticizing the colonial heritage, often packaged as modernity, and highlighting the indigenous philosophical traditions in the greater Bengal (Mazhar 2008).

In the remaining pages, I highlight two more key changes in contemporary Bangladesh that have direct implications for the Fakirs’ praxis. First, popular performers of Lalon’s songs tend to be reluctant to become disciples. And second, an institutionalized initiative promotes performances of Lalon’s songs independent of any commitment to the spiritual praxis.

3.2 Popularity Accompanies Anxiety

Fakirs are popular mainly for musical performances, but this popularity sometimes causes one major concern for the Fakirs. Although the number of general enthusiasts is increasing, few of them are interested in becoming devout practitioners. Even if some become initiated disciples, Rowshan Fakir and Nohir Fakir decried, most of them fail to continue practicing the rituals long enough to earn *khilafat*. The Fakirs also specified that now-a-days TV programs, newspaper reports, popular cultural events, and national institutions highlight Lalon’s songs, but few pay adequate attention to the spiritual practices of the Fakirs. The lack of dedication to spiritual praxis, accompanied by the popularity of Lalon’s songs, is likely to be related to the role of media.

Figure 3.5: Celebrated Singer Momtaj Performing in Cheuria, Kushtia³



On 16 October 2017, one popular Bengali newspaper, *Ittefaq*, published a report on 127th anniversary of Lalon’s *tirodhan* [‘disappearance’] in Cheuria. The report highlighted a picture (Figure 5) depicting the famous folk singer Momtaj performing at the anniversary of Lalon’s *tirodhan*. The picture shows a Baul in ochre robe playing an instrument standing beside Momtaj. Three important things are to note here. First, followers of Lalon in Bangladesh usually wear white dress only. But the image shows no practicing Fakirs; the people in the background wearing white dress seem not to be Fakirs, as none of the white-dressed people wear beards or long hairs. Second, Fakirs do not use any image of Lalon in performing the rituals, especially at Lalon’s *dham*. Third, the report failed to mention that the program was organized by a separate group named *Bharot Bangladesh Lalon Parishod* [India-Bangladesh Lalon Council], patronized by an Indian businessman. Moreover, it was the first such program organized by the newly formed *Parishod*. Furthermore, the report did not mention that the program was not a part of the Fakirs’ annual event, and it was not held simultaneously with the Fakirs’ rituals. The *Parishod* hosted the program during the day time, whereas the event observing Lalon’s *tirodhan* ritually started from the evening.

³ This image is taken from a report published by the Bengali daily newspaper, *Ittefaq*, on 16 October 2017, accessed on the same day from here: <http://www.ittefaq.com.bd/culture/2017/10/16/131535>.

Key Points – II

- Few practitioners but growing number of enthusiasts in recent times
- Media focus more on popular songs of Lalon than the praxis
- Contrary to the views of Gurus, popular singers find it inessential to be a life-long practitioner in order to become a performer of Lalon's songs
- Recent tendencies among the youth to become 'amateur Bauls'

According to an attendee of that program and a practitioner, local police prevented them from holding the program simultaneously with the Fakirs' ritual gathering. The law enforcing agencies only allowed Lalon Academy to use loud speakers and microphones. Police also did not allow several local groups including *Bhabnagor* and *Nobopran* to arrange parallel programs at Lalon's *dham*. Police claimed to do it for security reasons; they specifically prohibited using microphones, even if the sounds coming from smaller gatherings did not interrupt the voices generated at the government-sponsored stage organized by *Lalon Academy*. Understandably, if small groups used microphones simultaneously with the Academy's program held at the giant stage near Lalon's *dham*, the audience might not pay full attention to the voices approved by the government. However, with the same logic one can argue that the parallel cultural program organized by *Lalon Academy* prevents visitors from devoting full attention to the Fakirs' rituals.

Figure 3.6: The Removed Image of a Group of Fakirs in Conversation⁴



⁴ The image was taken from an online report originally published by *Ittefaq* on 16 October 2017 at local time 22:22, accessed on the same day. But it was excluded in the revised version of the same report.

Although the *Ittefaq* report claimed to cover one of the two annual events at Lalon's *dham*, it marginalized the main gathering of the Gurus at Lalon's *dham*. In another report on the same day, the newspaper published two images respectively of Lalon's *dham* and a group of Fakirs in conversation. That report was updated online on the next day at local time 01:36 to exclude the picture of the Fakirs (Figure 6). Apparently, the news value of the image of a group of practicing Fakirs is less than the picture of the decorated site. As the picturesque Lalon's *dham* appears more newsworthy than the image of few white-dressed Fakirs, visitors, and onlookers at Lalon's *dham* find musical performances and colorful decorations more attractive than submitting themselves to a Guru and participating in the heterodox spiritual praxis.

Fakirs also worry about the fact that popular performers of Lalon's songs often are not initiates; those non-initiate performers may lack sufficient understanding of the message of the songs, as they do not perform the bodily rituals under the supervision of a Guru. Non-initiate performers sometimes sing the songs meant to guide practicing couples before non-initiate audience, which Fakirs strongly discourage fearing that the audience may misinterpret the verses. Moreover, popular singers frequently disregard Fakirs' restriction for noninitiates to perform only *Doinya* songs as those songs highlight the general state of helplessness of humans, not any ritualistic bodily practices of spiritual couples.

Farida Parveen, the most famous singer of Lalon's songs in Bangladesh, is an exception. She made significant breakthroughs particularly by singing Lalon's songs in 'classical mode.' Her rendering of Lalon's songs became popular, especially among the educated middle class. Though Parveen learned music from two Fakirs, namely Moksed Shain and Karim Shain, she never became a disciple of a Guru. Parveen clarified, 'most people fascinated by Lalon believe in the guru of knowledge, I accepted the guru only in respect of singing' (Zakaria and Zaman 2004). She explained further:

There is a difference between the rendition of a baul song by an original baul and by one with a sophisticated voice. The difference that you have in my voice stems from the grounding I had in classical music. But, isn't it obvious that any singer has something personal to offer. (Zakaria and Zaman 2004).

While Parveen emphasized on the need for freedom in performing Lalon's songs, Gurus worry about the division between performers and practitioners. Parveen clearly separated singing Lalon's songs from becoming a practitioner, which Gurus generally discourage arguing that one should submit to a Guru and perform the rituals to realize the message of the songs. This insistence on separating performers

from practitioners by the legendary musician (followed by others) has contributed to popularizing Lalon's songs at the cost of committing to a life-long spiritual praxis.

Emphasizing on getting initiated by a Guru as a precondition for someone to be a performer of Lalon's songs, this paper does not reproduce the binary dichotomy of 'fake Baul' versus 'genuine Baul' or 'sadhak Baul' vs 'gayak Baul' (Lorea 2013: 426). Three important clarifications: First, unlike Lalon's songs, Baul songs may be written by many; second, Gurus advise non-initiates to avoid performing only those Lalon's songs that are supposed to be guidelines for disciples to perform the bodily rituals under strict guidelines of Gurus; and third, being able to sing Lalon's songs does not automatically make one Fakir. Instead, one may not sing Lalon's songs but still be a Fakir—disciple of a Guru and perform the rituals accordingly.

Fakirs' concern about the performer-practitioner divide becomes evident in recent tendencies among educated youth, who perform Lalon's songs, dress like Fakirs, attend ritual gatherings but do not submit themselves to a Guru. Hridoy Fakir exclaimed:

the bigger danger is that someone who doesn't have any Guru grows beard-mustache, wears white dress, sings Lalon's songs or doesn't, lives life in his/her own way, they are soukhin [amateur] Bauls; too many soukhin Bauls. [--] When someone asks who their Gurus are, then they say, "I am still searching for Guru but haven't found any." Haven't found, how come you have changed so much? [..] Such a craze among young generation is that they must sing Lalon's songs even if the instrument is just a guitar; must have long hairs like the followers of Lalon, and must attend programs at Lalon Sainji's place twice a year.

As extensive media coverage of Baul songs and Fakirs' ritual gatherings attract the attention of educated youth in contemporary Bangladesh, some become so fascinated by the music and the aura that they start regularly participating at the events and performing Baul songs, which at times earn them appreciation as singers. At some point those young enthusiasts, Hridoy Fakir said, start wearing white dresses and grow beards and mustache like Fakirs. Although their reputation as performers of Baul songs solidifies, the young fans fail to submit themselves to a Guru and become an initiate. Those non-initiated regular attendees of Fakirs' events gradually become amateur Bauls. The emergence of amateur Bauls is the latest face of non-initiate performers of Lalon's songs in Bangladesh.

3.3 Living Tradition turns into a Cultural Heritage

In 2008, UNESCO included Baul songs on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.⁵ From 2008 to 2010, UNESCO financed a project titled ‘Action Plan for the Safeguarding of Baul Songs.’ Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs implemented the project. Along with selected Fakir Gurus, members of civil society, specifically professors, researchers, and professional singers participated in implementing the project. The title of the project suggests that Baul songs are endangered, and hence the need for ‘safeguarding.’ The concern is explicit in the description: ‘The project aims at ensuring the proper transmission of Baul songs through a series of workshops bringing together Gurus and young Baul apprentices.’ UNESCO recognized the Fakirs’ songs as a ‘cultural heritage’ and expressed interest in contributing to ‘the proper transmission’ of the songs to a wider public. It is unclear what UNESCO considers ‘the proper transmission,’ as Gurus often disagree about both the correct lyrics and style of singing Lalon’s songs. The published report of that study focuses on both the authenticity of the lyrics and mode of singing approved by Gurus (Lohani 2010). It is unclear, however, how the differences of opinion regarding verses and composition style are addressed.

Key Points – III

- National and international efforts to promote Lalon’s songs as cultural heritage, undermining the importance of the Guru-led praxis
- Marginalizing *akhra* based spiritual training, workshops organized to popularize Lalon’s songs among the non-initiated youth
- Similar pattern of ‘ennobling’ folk tradition reported in West Bengal, India

Officials of UNESCO project organized four ‘workshops on *Baulsangeet* [Baul songs] training’ in Kushtia ‘to spread *Baulsangeet* among the young generation’ (Haq 2010: 13). The project officials assumed that the proper way of transmitting the songs was to hold workshops! Moreover, the Project Director (Haq 2010) emphasized the goal of popularizing Baul songs among the young generation, regardless of their commitment to understanding the spiritual message, let alone embodying it. Two important things are to note here. First, once again learning to perform Lalon’s songs was considered separate from being an initiate. Although the young trainees interacted directly with Gurus for a few hours, the apprentices were

⁵ A brief description of the project was accessed from here on March 9, 2017: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/projects/action-plan-for-the-safeguarding-of-baul-songs-00047>

not required to be initiates and possibly would not partake of the long journey that those adepts did with their Gurus to learn the songs and, more importantly, to perform the bodily rituals.

Second, it is counterproductive to propose that a long-term relationship between a Guru and a disciple is inessential to 'safeguard' Baul songs. The proposition that Gurus and disciples need to attend workshops to ensure 'the proper transmission' of Lalon's songs undercuts the legitimacy of a long-term *Akhra*-based pedagogy of the Gurus. Gurus prefer to have discussions with devotees or visitors at their *akhra*, as legend has it, '*Raja sadhur barite jai; Sadhu jai na!* [The king pays visit to Sadhu; Sadhu does not].' Rowshan Fakir explained, he usually did not visit or eat food at any non- initiate's place as he preferred to be served by devotees. When I asked why, he replied saying that it was not the quality of food but the sincere devotion and heartfelt love that the Fakirs crave for. Although the project did not suggest replacing the conventional Guru-disciple relationship, it is unusual to propose workshops, instead of long-term cultivation of a practicing relationship between a Guru and a disciple. This proposition also seems to ignore the fact that the songs and the actual spiritual practices of the Fakirs are closely intertwined; separating them undercuts the link between the two significant components of a spiritual praxis.

Bringing the Fakirs out of *akhras* to modern auditoriums turns heterodox Gurus into academic trainers; inviting enthusiastic youth to learn Lalon's songs at workshops undermines the importance of ritual initiation and submission of an egoistic self to a Guru. Not to mention, non-initiate performers of Lalon's songs fail to understand that Lalon's songs are supposed to be guidelines for practicing Fakirs. Thus, the stated goal of the UNESCO funded project to safeguard Baul songs translates into popularizing non-ritualistic performances of the songs at the cost of life-long commitment to spiritual praxis.

A similar pattern is also observed among the Bauls in West Bengal, India. Benjamin Krakauer (2015) analyzed how in West Bengal, India, affluent Bengalis appropriate the tradition of Bauls and in doing so 'ennoble' the folk tradition, which involves glorifying 'authentic' Bauls and castigating the rest. In the ennobling process, conventional practitioners became more vulnerable as they suffered from 'a loss of respect and loss of income' (Krakauer 2015: 356). The author analyzed the case of a middle-class singer Parvaty Baul. As an initiate, she wears only ochre robe and long dreadlocks. Parvaty Baul sings Baul songs with the signature instrument of Bauls, *ektara*. As an educated and formally trained singer, she speaks standard Bengali and English. Her rendering of Baul songs as *Kirtan* (a genre of devotional songs) coupled with whirl dancing readily attracts a wider audience. No wonder, she regularly performs at both national and international festivals. Krakauer observed that because of this kind of 'ennobling' of a folk tradition, conventional Baul

singers—who are not often educated, well-dressed, or professional—potentially lose the respect and financial support of the mass people. In Bangladesh, Farida Parveen’s rendition of Lalon’s songs in classical style makes her an icon of ‘ennobling’ Lalon’s songs. Unlike Parvaty Baul, Farida Parveen is a non-initiate and a strong advocate of separating performance of Lalon’s songs from being a practitioner. By popularizing Lalon’s songs among the educated class, both Farida Parveen and Parvaty Baul may have put some practitioners at the risk of losing income and recognition, but they created a large group of young, educated people interested in Lalon’s songs.

CHAPTER 4

COOPTATION

The interventions of the state and non-state apparatus in the Fakirs' spiritual praxis may appear to be a good example of Foucauldian power, but it is not. Instead, cooptation is a suitable conceptual framework to explain the dynamics. Foucault's power works not as coercion or as part of a social contract, but as a strategy (Foucault 1995). Instead of using crude force to dominate the Fakirs, public authorities in Bangladesh employed a long-term strategy of offering financial and administrative support in maintaining the sacred site. On behalf of the Fakirs, Nohir Fakir—one of the most prominent living Gurus—usually inaugurates the government sponsored program and often works closely with the public authorities. He insisted that now-a-days, Fakirs alone are unable to manage the annual events at Lalon's *dham* as numerous people from different backgrounds gather during the occasions; law enforcing agencies need to ensure security at the site. However, the prominent Fakir remarked:

the main point is that Lalon Sainji is Fakirs' property. Fakirs will manage it [Lalon's dham], but with the interventions of the [Lalon] Academy and its people, District Administration, things are little bit messy. [--] There are certain rules of organizing Sadhusangas [ritual gathering], but those rules are not properly followed. [--] However, what happens is not too bad because the district administration is there...they try to respect Sadhus...serve food. Sadhus get priority here. These people keep Sadhus in front and do their job.

When I asked about the time when the interventions of public authorities through Lalon Academy started, he pointed out:

this situation started after 2003...when a large amount of grant was commissioned. At that time Kaligonga river was filled, the stage was formed, then the auditorium and guest house were built, trees in the vicinity of Lalon's majaan (shrine) were cut, [--] with the cooperation of the Government, the people involved with [Lalon] Academy did all these. In this way [with these donations and constructions] they secured their influence.

Nohir Fakir appears to be fully aware of the long-term implications of the 'development works' funded by the public bodies. Yet he is complicit in executing part of their plan. While the implications of the government funded 'development' works may look consistent with Foucauldian conceptualization of power, the

disapproval of the status quo that Nohir Fakir embodies undercuts the legitimacy of modern power. Moreover, the memories of Fakirs' unified protest against the blatant aggression of a government official in the 1990s are still alive. The son of late Fakir Montu Shah is actively trying to revive the Fakirs' committee. While senior Gurus, e.g., Nohir Fakir expressed mixed opinion regarding the interventions of the dominant public and private agencies, the contemporary bearers of the spirit of Fakir Montu Shah realize a change characteristic of cooptation: 'It is difficult to mobilize against a claim that appears to be one's "own" even if it is no longer used to mean what one intended' (Stratigaki 2004: 36).

Cooptation works through 'blunting' and 'channeling' (Corntassel 2007). Lalon Academy's parallel cultural programs and the active participation of government officials, intellectuals, and popular performers at the big, decorated stage besides Lalon's *dham* channel the interest of the wider audience from the rituals of Gurus to popular performances of Lalon's songs and the speeches of public figures. While Gurus consider the annual gatherings at Lalon's *dham* important occasions to cultivate a heterodox spiritual bond among the practitioners, prospective devotees, and well-wishers, the prominence of the stage and the activities of non-initiate, invited guests undermine the counter-hegemonic nature of the rituals. The consequence of which is cooptation—a measure of mainstreaming' (Corntassel 2007: 164).

One of the important means of cooptation is sponsoring; 'sponsoring is particularly problematic because it can create a resource dependency [--]' (Baur and Schmitz 2012: 13). Fakirs typically depend on devotees' and sympathizers' financial contribution to pay for the expenses in organizing the observances. But Lalon Academy has gradually made the community of the Fakirs resource-dependent on the public authorities, specifically to organize annual gatherings at the *dham*. The Academy also coordinates in collecting fund for organizing the annual *sadhusangas*, specifically for serving food to all participants of the gatherings. Collecting money to serve thousands of participants may be too big of a responsibility for the Fakirs to bear alone. However, participation of greater number of people at the *Sadhusangas* and having a secured funding from the government contribute to compromising the ritual accuracy at the most important site of the Gurus. Nahir Fakir confessed, 'there are certain rules of organizing *Sadhusangas* [ritual gathering], but those rules are not properly followed.' Practicing Fakirs inside Lalon complex remain almost always surrounded by numerous onlookers; journalists and enthusiasts record the activities of the Fakirs on the phone or with professional cameras. Practitioners often lack sufficient space and quietness to immerse themselves into the spiritual realm.

Nohir Fakirs' remark is particularly significant in this regard: 'These people [of Lalon Academy] keep Sadhus [Fakirs] in front and do their job.' The government

officials and their authorized representatives of Lalon Academy, and the media claim to support the Fakirs and promote Lalon's spiritual ideals. However, the visible result of that 'cooperation' is the transformation of Fakirs' ritualistic congregation into conventional cultural programs. This transformation reflects an important feature of cooptation: '[--] the capitalist marketplace transforms the symbols and practices of countercultural opposition into a constellation of trendy commodities and depoliticized fashion styles that are readily assimilated into the social mainstream' (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007: 136). In making the point Thompson and Coskuner-Balli corroborated the well-known arguments of Clark (2003), Ewen (1988), and Hebdige (1991). Hridoy Fakir's observation on the rising trend of amateur Baul and the increasing appreciation of non-practicing popular performances of Lalon songs at the cost of a life-long commitment to the praxis are two key notable ways the heterodox praxis of the Fakirs turns into 'trendy commodities.'

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It is an understatement to say that practicing Fakirs are less appreciated than professional performers of Lalon's songs in contemporary Bangladesh. The idea that long-term psycho-somatic training under the supervision of Gurus is essential in understanding Fakirs' praxis and performing Lalon's songs has become at least unpopular and unwarranted at most. To explain why popular performers of Lalon's songs outshine initiate practitioners, this paper traced the history of a long process of coopting the heterodox Fakirs. I identified three important ways in which this process has evolved. First, it is the strategy of the government to act as a 'development partner' at Lalon's *dham*; the public officials gradually secure the dominant role in managing the annual events of the heterodox Fakirs and launching a parallel cultural program. Second, extensive media coverage of popular performers of Lalon's songs marginalizes practicing initiates and Gurus. Third, with concerted efforts of some members of civil society, multinational agencies (specifically UNESCO), and public authorities, Lalon's songs are promoted as 'cultural heritage' independent of any spiritual praxis.

Fakirs have been facing three overlapping crises in recent times. First, there is a lack of widely-respected and influential Gurus, such as Montu Shah (who led the Fakirs to collectively protest the government's attempt to intervene in managing Lalon's *dham*) or Loban Shah (who was known to have a strong and articulate voice among the Fakirs). Second, the number of devotees who can potentially earn *khilafat* in the future is reportedly decreasing. And third, a trend is emerging among the youth to become an amateur Baul. While the first type symbolizes the deterioration of Fakirs' spiritual strength, the third one is the latest phase of an ongoing process of coopting the heterodox Fakirs.

While Fakirs do not intend to be in complete isolation from local community, their longstanding practice is to keep themselves at a liminal space. However, the practitioners or Gurus often need (and seek) support from the local public authorities, especially regarding the security of the site. How these two apparently conflicting needs of the followers of Lalon can be managed remains an important issue. More importantly, this implicit tension is not necessarily a matter of concern. Instead, this can be considered a productive unease. Fakirs' heterodox worldviews and practices, especially the insightful songs of Fakirs, would be unthinkable without this productive unease. At the same time, the difference between the Fakirs' worldview and that of the majority communities in Bangladesh is a necessary chasm that should

compel both of them to reflect on each other. The challenge, however, is to continue to make the unease productive, not antagonistic.

This study has several limitations. While the current study includes the opinion of the practicing Fakirs and Gurus, the viewpoints of other stakeholders namely the representatives of Lalon Academy, local and national public officials, and the editors of various newspapers and officials of TV channels remain unattended. Although the published newspaper and TV reports broadly reflect the policies of the media, how the representatives of media respond to the questions of cooptation can be an important area of future investigation. As the interventions of the public bodies are essential to ensure security at Lalon's *dham*, another area of future research is to examine how the relationship between the heterodox Fakirs and the government officials can be reconsidered so that marginalized communities like Fakirs are allowed necessary freedom to sustain their heterodox life-practice.

Allowing Fakirs sufficient freedom to continue their unorthodox life-practices is important not to preserve Lalon's songs as cultural heritage but to allow the practitioners to pursue their desired spiritual goal to embody an alternative subjectivity and sociality. Fakirs' heterodox praxis can potentially play an important role in combating social ills such as caste prejudice, misogyny, and religious intolerance.

The capacity to acknowledge the crisis of the [contemporary global political] system and the potential to object to the global bājār [market] is the actual śakti [power] offered by a territorial and oppositional sādhanā [spiritual praxis] leading to affirmation and indifference. (Ferrari 2012: 35)

Ferrari's optimism about the potentiality of the Fakirs deserves both careful and critical attention. Fakirs' principle of combating egoism and cherishing indivisibility of all beings, especially humans, regardless of their any other identity, may be considered important intellectual resources in responding to the problems of neoliberalism and commodification of life. But that optimism should not, at the same time, lead to exoticization of the marginalized initiates. In the same vein, emphasizing the need for being a practitioner in upholding Fakir Lalon's spirituality, one should be cautious to avoid 'hypermarginalization' (Bessire *et al.* 2014) of the members of the Fakir community who may not afford to wear white dress or organize a *sadhusanga*.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

- a. The final verdict of the court regarding management of Fakir's *dham* should be implemented without further delay.
- b. Two separate committees may be formed to oversee Fakirs' events in Cheuria: One committee to manage Fakirs' spiritual rituals and another to oversee the administrative and security issues. The two committees should be led by a senior Guru and a representative of public officials, respectively.
- c. Any other programs (such as that of *Bharot Bangladesh Lalon Parishod*) should not be held *parallelly* with Fakirs' annual events at Lalon's *dham* or in the vicinity.
- d. A central sound system can be introduced to ensure the primacy of the voices of the spiritual masters during the annual gatherings at Lalon's *dham* in Cheuria.

REFERENCES

- Aman, Shanaz. 2011. "Mantu Shah; key preserver of Lalon songs, passes away." *The Kushtia Times*, September 26. Accessed November 22, 2017. <http://www.thekushtiatimes.com/26/09/2011/mantu-shah-key-preserver-of-lalon-songs-passes-away/>.
- Baur, Dorothea, and Hans Peter Schmitz. 2012. "Corporations and NGOs: When Accountability Leads to Co-optation." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106 (1):9-21.
- Bessire, Lucas, João Biehl, Claudia Briones, Bret Gustafson, Jean E Jackson, Irene Roca Ortíz, and Lucas Bessire. 2014. "The Rise of Indigenous Hypermarginality: Native Culture as a Neoliberal Politics of Life." *Current Anthropology*, 55 (3):276-295, P(25).
- Cakrabarti, Sudhir. 1989. *Gabhir Nirjan Pathe*. Calcutta: Anand Publishers.
- Cakrabarti, Sudhir. 1992. *Bratya Lokayata Lalan*. Kalkata, India: Pustak Bipani.
- Choudhury, Abul Ahsan. 2009a. "Introduction." In *Lalan Samagra*, edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury. Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh.
- Choudhury, Abul Ahsan. 2009b. *Lalon Shamagra*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Pathak Shamabesh.
- Clark, Dylan. 2003. "The Death and Life of Punk, the Last Subculture." In: *The Post-subcultures Reader*, edited by David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, 223-36. New York and Oxford: Berg.
- Corntassel, Jeff. 2007. "Partnership in Action? Indigenous Political Mobilization and Co-optation during the First UN Indigenous Decade (1995-2004)." *Human Rights Quarterly*:137-166.
- Coy, Patrick G., and Timothy Hedeem. 2005. "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-optation: Community Mediation in the United States." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46 (3):405-435.
- Das, Matilal. 1958. *Lalon-Gitika* (Songs of Lalon). Calcutta: India: Calcutta University Press
- Das, Rahul Peter. 1992. "Problematic Aspects of the Sexual Rituals of the Bauls of Bengal." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 112 (3):388-432.
- Ewen, Stuart. 1988. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ferrari, Fabrizio M. 2012. "Mystic Rites for Permanent Class Conflict: The Bauls of Bengal, Revolutionary Ideology and Post-Capitalism." *South Asia Research*, 32 (1):21-38.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.
- Gamson, William A. 1969. *Power and Discontent*. USA: Dorsey Press.
- Haq, Md. Nazrul. 2010. "Message from the Project Director and Publisher." In *Baulsangeet* (A Collection of Baul Songs): Action Plan for the Safeguarding of Baul Songs, edited by Kamal Lohani, 13-14. Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.
- Hebdige, Dick. 1991. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London; New York: Routledge.

- Hitokori. 1890. "Mohatma Lalon Fakir." In *Lalon Shamagra*, edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury. Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh.
- Jha, Saktinath. 1995. "Cari-candra Bhed: Use of the four moons." In *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, 65-108. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
- Jha, Saktinath. 2002. *Baul Fakir Dhongsher Andoloner Itibritta*. Kolkata, India: Subornorekha.
- Jha, Saktinath. 2008. "Laloner Manush-tatwa [The theory of human by Lalon]." In *Lalon Shamagra*, edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury. Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh
- Jha, Saktinath. 2010. *Bastubadi Baul: Udbhab Samaj Sanskriti O Darshan* (An analytical study of the Materialistic Outlook of Bauls of Bengal and their Origin, Society, Culture and Philosophy). Kalkata, India: Dey's Publishing.
- Knight, Lisa I. 2011. *Contradictory Lives: Baul Women in India and Bangladesh*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kperogi, Farooq A. 2011. "Cooperation with the Corporation? CNN and the Hegemonic Cooptation of Citizen Journalism Through iReport. com." *New Media & Society*, 13 (2):314-329.
- Krakauer, Benjamin. 2015. "The Ennobling of a "Folk Tradition" and the Disempowerment of the Performers: Celebrations and Appropriations of Bāul-Fakir Identity in West Bengal." *Ethnomusicology*, 59 (3):355-379.
- Lacy, Michael G. 1982. "A Model of Cooptation Applied to the Political Relations of the United-States and American-Indians." *Social Science Journal*, 19 (3):23-36.
- Lohani, Kamal ed. 2010. *Baulsangeet (A Collection of Baul Songs): Action Plan for the Safeguarding of Baul Songs*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.
- Lorea, Carola Erika. 2013. "Playing the Football of Love on the Field of the Body" 1: The Contemporary Repertoire of Baul Songs." *Religion and the Arts*, 17 (4):416-451.
- Lorea, Carola Erika. 2014. "Searching for the Divine, Handling Mobile Phones: Contemporary Lyrics of Baul Songs and their Osmotic Response to Globalisation." *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 8 (1):59-88.
- Masahiko, Togawa. 2013. "Sharing the Narratives: An Anthropologist Among the Local People at the Mausoleum of Fakir Lalon Shah in Bangladesh." *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*:21-36.
- Mazhar, Farhad. 2008. *Bhabandolon* (Philosophical Discourse). Dhaka: Mowa Brothers.
- McDaniel, June. 1992. "The Embodiment of God among the Bāuls of Bengal." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*:27-39.
- Openshaw, Jeanne. 2002. *Seeking Bauls of Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pickard, Victor W. 2008. "Cooptation and Cooperation: Institutional Exemplars of Democratic Internet Technology." *New Media & Society*, 10 (4):625-645.
- Rafiuddin, Khodokar. 2009. *Bhab-sangeet*. Dhaka: Sadar Prokashoni.
- Selznick, P. 1949. *TVA and the Grassroots: A Study of Politics and Organization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Sharif, Ahmad. 2009. "Lalon Shah." In *Lalon Shamagra*. Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh.
- Stratigaki, Maria. 2004. "The Cooptation of Gender Concepts in EU Policies: The Case of "Reconciliation of Work and Family." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 11 (1):30-56.
- Thompson, Craig J, and Gokcen Coskuner-Balli. 2007. "Countervailing Market Responses to Corporate Co-optation and the Ideological Recruitment of Consumption Communities." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (2):135-152.
- Zakaria, Saymon, and Mustafa Zaman. 2004. "Melodies for Eternity: Farida Parveen's Life in Focus." *Star Weekend Magazine*.