

Islamic Esotericism in the Bengali Bāul Songs of Lālan Fakir

Keith Cantú

kecantu@ucsb.edu

Abstract

This article makes use of the author’s field research as well as primary and secondary textual sources to examine Islamic esoteric content, as mediated by local forms of Bengali Sufism, in Bāul Fakiri songs. I provide a general summary of Bāul Fakiri poets, including their relationship to Islam as well as their departure from Islamic orthodoxy, and present critical annotated translations of five songs attributed to the nineteenth-century Bengali poet Lālan Fakir (popularly known as “Lalon”). I also examine the relationship of Bāul Fakiri sexual rites (*sādhanā*) and principles of embodiment (*dehatattva*), framed in Islamic terminology, to extant scholarship on Haṭhayoga and Tantra. In the final part of the article I emphasize how the content of these songs demonstrates the importance of esotericism as a salient category in a Bāul Fakiri context and offer an argument for its explanatory power outside of domains that are perceived to be exclusively Western.

Keywords: Sufism; Islam; Esotericism; Metaphysics; Traditionalism

The history of the Bāul Fakirs includes centuries of religious innovation in which various poets have gradually created a folk tradition highly unique to Bengal, that is, Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. While there have been several important works published on Bāul Fakirs in recent years,¹ in this article I aim to contribute specifically to scholarship on Islamic esoteric content in Bāul Fakiri songs, as mediated by local forms of Sufism.² Analyses in

1. In addition to numerous articles, a few of the most notable books over the past few decades include Salomon, *City of Mirrors*; Lorea, *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman*; Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*; Openshaw, *Writing the Self*; and Hanssen, *Women, Religion and the Body in South Asia*.

2. Terms like “heterodox,” “esoteric,” and even “Sufism” are of course often problematically applied in an Islamic context, but seem more than applicable when describing the Bāul Fakirs; their use will be clarified as relevant.

English-language scholarship of such content are often limited compared to the songs' more familiar references to Hindu (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, or Śākta) lore. To emphasize the importance of the songs' Islamic esoteric symbolism, I will first provide a brief historical summary of Bengali Sufism and demonstrate how it has informed the Bāul Fakiri movement over the past few centuries. I will then highlight the significance of the title *darbeś*,³ or “dervish” in Bengali Sufi literature, comparing it with the title “dervish” in a Bāul Fakiri context. My aim in treating Bāul material from this perspective is to encourage scholars who are likely much more well-versed in Arabic, Persian, North African, or other Islamic contexts to become better acquainted with Bāul Fakiri source material in Bengali and to be able to more precisely connect it to their own work within a wider framework of Islamic esotericism. In the pages that follow and especially in the conclusion I will examine what I mean by Islamic esotericism, with reference to both scholars and their objects of study in the academic field of Western esotericism and its branch of modern occultism.

Throughout this article I have selectively interspersed annotated translations for five songs attributed⁴ to Lālan Fakir or Lālan Sāi⁵ (d. 1890 CE, most popularly transliterated as “Lalon” or “Lalon Shah”) that I gradually received during

3. All italicized terms are transliterations from Bengali unless otherwise noted as derived from Sanskrit (Skt.), Persian (Pers.) or Arabic (Ar.). Transliterations of Bengali follow the precedent set in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, with the exception being a reversal of *ya* and *ya* according to contemporary library standards. Proper names are usually transliterated with diacritics except in some cases where there is a popular or preferred roman variant.

4. These songs are only “attributed” to Lālan since they bear his signature or *bhāṇitā*, as well as in some cases that of Sirāj Sāi his guru. However, to my knowledge they are not found in the earliest diary compiled by Rabindranath Tagore. The songs I have selected are nevertheless considered by living Bāul Fakirs to be authentic compositions of Lālan, and bear the marks of his lyrical style. They have all been published as circulating Bāul Fakiri songs, regardless of actual authorship, and are performed today by Bāul Fakirs. Furthermore, they reflect Lālan's use of Islamic esoteric symbolism as understood and formulated by his disciples, regardless of whether he was indeed the composer. Cf. Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 3–5 for her opinion of what constitutes the core of Lālan's songs.

5. For the sake of consistency I have preferred rendering Bengali proper names with diacritics whenever possible. However, sometimes this is relaxed in cases where a spelling is generally recognized in English. I also have elected to transliterate Bengali *pha* as *fa* in the word “fakir” (*phakir*) and its derivatives for the sake of readability.

my travels and field work in Bangladesh, all of which to varying degrees contain references to what is perhaps best described as a wider Islamic esotericism. Each of these songs were received and written down in collaboration with Bāul Fakirs and artists in Bangladesh, with the lyrics cross-checked by the author during conversations and performances (see Acknowledgments). After returning from the field I have been afforded with the opportunity to compare these oral versions with published sources for all these songs. Although sources are scarce, the combined critical analysis of oral, handwritten, and published sources makes it possible to establish reliable translations of these songs based on critical Bengali recensions.⁶

Bengali Sufism and Bāul Fakirs

Bengali Sufi traditions have been extensively and variously documented in the scholarship of Richard Eaton, Ayesha Irani, David Cashin, and Hans Harder, not to mention several other scholars in India and Bangladesh who have published extensively on the subject, such as Āhmad Śarīph, Asim Roy, Enamul Hak, M. R. Tarafdar, Shashibhusan Dasgupta, and Kashshaf Ghani.⁷ Enamul Hak's own historical trajectory for the most part begins with the spread of Sufism to Bengal around the thirteenth century via the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya orders (Ar. *ṭarīqa*, plural *ṭuruq*) and, a few centuries later, with the Naqshbandiyya, Madariyya, Adhamiyya, and Qadiriyya orders.⁸ “Sufism”

6. For philological issues surrounding the editing and analysis of Lālan Fakir's songs, which are extant in both oral and written (manuscript and printed) sources, see Salomon, “On Editing the Songs of Lālan Fakir using both Oral and Written Sources” in *City of Mirrors*, 3–11. For these translations I have mostly preferred the oral versions I committed to writing and cross-checked with Bāul Fakirs and Fakirānis, except in some instances where the published version is clearly superior and accords with the meaning of the song.

7. Irani, “The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love;” Cashin, *The Ocean of Love*; Harder, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh*; Śarīph, *Bānglār Sūfī Sabītya*; Śarīph, *Bāul Tattva*; Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*; Hak, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*; Tarafdar, “An Indigenous Source for Bengal Sufism;” and Tarafdar, *Husain Shabi Bengal, 1494–1538 A.D.*; Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*; Ghani, “Mystical Traditions and Voices of Dissent.”

8. Enamul Hak, quoted in Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 168–69. Precise dates for each of these orders' presence in Bengal remain speculative, although Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi attempted to

(*suphibād*) and its adjective “Sufi” are of course highly polysemantic, but in this context can be used to define a sense of doctrinal cohesiveness that developed among these various orders that permeated the religious landscape of Bengal.

Long considered the far-flung eastern “frontier” of the Islamic world, to quote Eaton’s now classic study,⁹ it is important however to recognize that Sufism was not merely imposed from outside; Bengali actors also played a role in fostering centers of Islamic arts and learning that were closer to home, and these centers also produced Sufi literature in Persian and later Bengali. Thibaut d’Hubert has convincingly argued for the presence of one such center at Arakan (also known in sources as Mrauk-U or Roshang), a medieval coastal kingdom that flourished from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in the regions between what are today the countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar.¹⁰

Regardless of whether Bāul Fakirs ultimately derived their Islamic references from Arakanese traders or from Persian-speaking *pīrs* and other settlers entering Bengal from the northwest of India, however, an examination of the esoteric dimensions of these interactions provides important data for the broader question as to how Sufi mediators actually understood and interpreted their own teachings when engaging with extant local points of view. One such example is their interpretation of Sufi recitation (*jhikar*, < Ar. *dhikr*) as interchangeable with Tantric mantra-recitation (*jap*, < Skt. *japa*). This is perhaps best exemplified in “*Paṛo mukhe sadāi lā il lā hā il lā lā*,”¹¹ a song by Lālan Fakir that is centered on an esoteric interpretation of the Shahada (Ar. *al-shahada*) or “testimony” that “there is no God but Allah”:

situate each historically in a wider Indian context in his two volumes of *A History of Sufism in India*.

9. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*.

10. D’Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace*. See also Projit Bihari Mukharji, “The Flame and the Breeze.”

11. These songs are cited by the first line of their *sthāyi-antarā* “permanent verse” or “chorus,” as is customary for Lālan Fakir’s songs, which do not have separate titles.

Song One: “Pāro mukhe sadāi lā il lā hā il lā lā”¹²

“With your mouth¹³ always pray ‘lā il lā hā il lā lā.’”¹⁴

The messenger of Allah¹⁵ made this precept resound.

The negation¹⁶ is called “lā il lā hā.”

“Il lā lā hu”¹⁷ is the bountiful day.¹⁸

Whoever speaks this negation and affirmation¹⁹

is a devotee of Allah.²⁰

Keep invoking²¹ the name in meditation,²²

together with its form.²³

If you call out without visualizing,²⁴

will you know what form your Allah takes?

12. The author first received this song from the late Sādhu Humāyan Fakir of Narsingdi, Bangladesh. A published version of this song can be found in Āhamad, *Lālan gīti samagra*, song no. 584.

13. *mukh*. Lit. “mouth,” “face.” Alt. trans.: “voice.”

14. Lit. “There is no god but Allah” (< Ar. *lā ʾilāha ʾillā llāh*). This is of course the first part of the Shahada, the recitation of which is the “first pillar” of Islam.

15. *rasul ulla* (< Ar. *rasulu llāh*), i.e. the Prophet Muhammad. This is a pun on the second part of the Shahada.

16. *nafi* (likely < Pers. *nafi*).

17. This is the affirmation (*esbad*, < Pers. *esbāt*) to which “lā il lā hā” is the negation.

18. *din dayāmay*. Alt. trans.: “day filled with mercy.” In Bengali *din* is also a homonym of *dim* (< Ar. *dīm*), “religion,” “way of life,” which Lālan occasionally puns on.

19. *naphi esbad* (< Pers. *nafi esbāt*), i.e. the combined phrase “lā il lā hā il lā lā.”

20. Alt. trans.: “is a servant of God.”

21. *rākhile japa*. Lit. “cause the recitation to be kept up.” The term *jap* (< Skt. *japa*) implies the recitation of a mantra.

22. “In meditation” translates *dhīyāne* (< Hindustani *dhīyān*, < Skt. *dhīyāna*).

23. “Form” translates *rūp* (< Skt. *rūpa*).

24. “Without visualizing” translates *be-niśānā* (< Pers. neg. pfx. *bi* + *neshāna*). According to Ferdous Fakirani, the term implies thinking of something without envisioning it (*darśan chāyā*). This *antarā* is questioning whether *be-niśānā* is the best way to invoke him, given that Allah has a form (*rūp*) according to Lālan.

Knowing him who is
without a partner,²⁵
pray these words²⁶
in your heart²⁷ and with your voice.
You will be released
and remain in happiness.
You will see the manifesting light.²⁸

The Lord,²⁹ Allah, and the Light³⁰ have said
This invocation³¹ is a heavy door.
Sirāj Sāi says, “Oh disheveled³² Lālan,
listen to this heartfelt advice!”³³

Despite the explicit presence of such Bengali Sufi symbolism in their song lyrics, it is important to stress that Bāul Fakirs frame their tradition as *mānuṣ-bhakti* (literally “devotion to the human being”) and can be from any religious background or *jāt* (< Skt. *jāti*, “caste,” “birth-religion”) – they accordingly critique all forms of sectarian religion. Lālan Fakir’s lyrical output is especially characterized by a distinction between the exoteric, literal Qur’ān and the so-called

25. *lā śarik* (< Ar. *lā sharik*). For the use of this phrase see Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 6–8. This could also be a double entendre, since *lā* “without,” or “not” is also a reference to the primal Śakti (cf. Song Four below). If this is taken to be the meaning, the verse would instead be translated “knowing him who is the partner of the Śakti [...]”

26. “Words” translates *kālam* (< Pers. *kalām*).

27. *dele* (< Pers. *del*).

28. *nūr tajella* (possibly < Pers. *tajalli*).

29. “Lord” translates *sāi* (< Skt. *svāmi*).

30. “Light” translates *nūr* (< Ar. *nūr*).

31. *jhikar* (< Ar. *dhikar*), lit. “remembrance.” This refers to the Sufi practice of repeating various strings of text in prayer, and in this song equated with the practice of *jap* or mantra-recitation.

32. “Disheveled” translates *bel illā*, obscure in Bengali. According to Azim Sāi, it refers to someone who is *āulāno*, an endearing insult of sorts that implies someone’s unkempt hair and low status. Here Lālan, as he often does, is applying the descriptor to himself.

33. “Heartfelt advice” translates *phukāri*, an obscure word in Bengali (possibly < Pers. *feker*, “idea”). According to Azim Sāi, it connotes *maner kathā*, lit. “sayings of the heart.”

“book of the heart” (*del-korān*).³⁴ Carol Salomon describes this distinction as follows, based on her translations as well as her numerous ethnographic interviews in the field in the 1980s:

The Bāuls, like the Sufis, assert that the Prophet taught two types of doctrines, one exoteric (*ẓāhir*), recorded in the Qur’ān and meant for the general public, and the other esoteric (*bātin*), only hinted at in the Qur’ān and aimed at the select few who are able to grasp its meaning and who pass it down from heart to heart. Sharī’at, Islamic law, is for followers of the exoteric path, while Ma’rifat, mystic knowledge, is for followers of the esoteric path.³⁵

Salomon’s mention of the latter two concepts, Islamic law (*śarīyat* < Pers. *sharī’at*; Ar. *sharī’a*) and gnosis (*mārapbat* < Ar. *ma’rifā*), reflects the Bāul Fakiri privileging of *mārapbat* over *śarīyat*, which is questioned as a dispensable “cover,” as in the following lyrics by Lālan (translated by Salomon):

sharī’a is a cover,
so it’s written;
ma’rifā is the stuff
that is hidden.
Do I save the cover
or throw it out?
It’s the stuff Lālan craves.³⁶

In her research, Salomon did note that one of Lālan’s songs appears to espouse *śarīyat*, but concluded that this is under the pretense that the esoteric meaning of *śarīyat* is to be interpreted in sexual terms, namely as the retention of semen

34. See also the reference to *del-korān* in the song “Nabi nā cine ki āllā pābe” (“Will you get Allah if you don’t know the Prophet?”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 344–47.

35. Salomon, “Bāul Songs,” 191. For the way in which a similar dynamic was expressed in Shiism, using “truth” (Ar. *ḥaqīqa*) instead of “gnosis” (Ar. *ma’rifā*), see Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 26–28.

36. *śarāke sarāḥos lekḥā yāy / bastu mārapbat se dhākā āche tāy / sarāḥos thui tule o ki dūi phele / lālan bastu bhikāri*. These lyrics are found in the third *antarā* or “verse” of the song “E ki āin nabi karlo jāri” (“What kind of law did the Prophet preach?”), published and annotated in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 132–34. The song was also published in her paper “On the Concept of Sharīat in Baul Songs.” I am thankful to Carola Lorea for bringing this paper to my attention.

practiced during Bāul sexual rituals, which we will consider below.³⁷ In any event, Lālan does not limit his critiques to Islamic law but also critiques Hindu notions of *dharmā* and what he sees as blind adherence to the Vedas and other scriptures, calling into question a wide assortment of nineteenth-century religious mores prevailing in Bengal, including in Christianity.³⁸ The song “Āpni āpnār fānā hale” is a quintessential example of one such critique in song-form, universalizing the concept of *phānā* (< Ar. *fanāʾ*) or the self’s “dissolution” or “annihilation” across religious and linguistic barriers:

Song Two: “Āpnār āpni fānā hale”³⁹

With your own self’s dissolution⁴⁰
you will realize him.⁴¹
What name will I call on
to raise my heart to the skies?

In Arabic they say “Allah.”
In Farsi they say “Khoda⁴² the exalted”⁴³
“God” say all the disciples of Jesus.
In different countries there are different ways.

37. Carol Salomon, “On the Concept of Sharīat in Baul Songs.”

38. For more on Lālan’s rejection of religious laws in general see Salomon, “Bāul Songs,” 191.

39. The author first received this song from Bidhān Śā, and subsequently cross-checked it with fakirs. A published version of this song can be found in Āhamad, *Lālan gīti samagra*, song no. 282. This song has also been popularized by Anusheh Anadīl, who is known for her work in the fusion band “Bangla” as well as her solo work. She has performed this song in various styles, emphasizing its cross-cultural message.

40. *phānā* (< Ar. *fanāʾ*): “annihilation,” “dissolution.” The term has a special significance in Sufi literature, where it often refers to annihilation in God. In Lālan’s songs the term instead seems to refer to annihilation in oneself.

41. Alt. trans. “him” or “her.” The gender of the pronoun *tāre* (i.e. *take*) is ambiguous.

42. *Khodā* (< Pers. *khudā*) is the Persian/Farsi name for God, often used in Bengali as well.

43. “Most-High” translates *tālā* (likely < Ar. *taʾālā*).

Allah, Hari,⁴⁴ their worship and rites⁴⁵ —
these are all human creations.
When the unnamed is unknown,
it's impossible to speak.⁴⁶

Expressed from the heart's attitude,⁴⁷
language arises in the three worlds.
Yet the heart
in its primal, uncaught reflection⁴⁸
has neither language nor grammar.

Dissolve into yourself⁴⁹
and you'll become the realized one.⁵⁰
Sirāj Sāi says “Lālan, you're blind —
See for a moment⁵¹ the true form⁵² in forms.”⁵³

Who are the Bāul Fakirs of Bengal?

In an article such as this it is appropriate to first provide some general context for the Bāul Fakirs (*phakir*, male) and Fakirānis (*phakirāni*, female), especially since they are the chief inheritors of Lālan's songs.⁵⁴ However, in addressing this con-

44. Hari is another name for the god Viṣṇu or his avatar Kṛṣṇa.

45. *bbajan pūjan* (i.e. *bhakti* and *pūjā*).

46. *bāgendriya* (< Skt. *vāgendriya*) *nā sambhabe*, lit. “the faculty of speaking is not possible.”

47. *maner bhāb*. Alt. trans. “the heart's devotion.”

48. *adbar cinte*. Alt. trans. “uncatchable thought.”

49. *āpnāte āpani phānā*. The double use of the honorific second-person pronoun stresses the reflexivity of *phānā*.

50. Alt. trans. “and you will realize it.”

51. *saṅkṣepe*. Alt. trans. “briefly,” “momentarily.”

52. *svarūp* (< Skt. *svarūpa*). Alt. trans. “inherent form,” “essential nature.” For the technical importance of this term in Bāul Fakiri songs (as well as in Tantra more broadly) see Bhaṭṭācārya, *Bāṅlār Bāul o Bāul Gaṅ*, 357–68.

53. “Forms” translates *riṭe* (< Skt. *rūpa*), which here can either be singular or plural.

54. This brief account, while based on the author's own experiences in the field (spanning around two years in Bangladesh and to a lesser extent West Bengal), is far from exhaustive. The

text we are immediately faced with a problem of terminology. The category “Bāul” (possibly deriving from Skt. *vātula* “crazy,” “full of wind,” or *vyākula*, “bewildered”) remains unstable, as with the anthropologist Jeanne Openshaw’s use of the related category *bartamān-panthī*, or “follower of *bartamān*” (that is, the present reality at hand, in Bāul contexts the body).⁵⁵ Since a full analysis of the semantic range of potential categories is outside the scope of this article, I have preferred Bāul Fakir and its adjective Bāul Fakiri (as proposed by Sudhir Chakraborty) for the sake of simplicity and to stress that both identities (“Bāul” and “Fakir”) are interwoven in the tradition and songs I will describe and translate in this article, those of Lālan Fakir. However, it is important to consider the fact that some Bāul Fakirs may only emically identify with one or the other (i.e., either “Bāul” or “Fakir”), and in some cases may even see them as different categories altogether, as we will see below.

Bāul Fakirs of all stripes are distinguished by their great reverence for the songs of Lālan Fakir. However, respect is also accorded to other important Bāul Fakiri poets, the most significant of which for our purposes is Pāñju Khondakār (1851–1914, also known as Pāñju Śāh), an associate of Lālan who seems to have contributed to the latter’s understanding of Islamic esoteric themes as well as his musical style of *bhāb-saṅgīt*, or “music for reflection.”⁵⁶ The songs of Duddu Śāh (1841–1911),⁵⁷ one of Lālan’s direct disciples, as well as those of a wide variety of other artists as well as independent compositions are also commonly performed, but Lālan’s songs are often given preeminence at most festivals in Bangladesh, due in large part to his cultural status and familiarity. In West Bengal, however, the tradition appears to be more decentralized, and the songs of other Bāul poets

Anglophone reader is referred to the published works of Carol Salomon, Jeanne Openshaw, Carola Erika Lorea, and Charles Capwell for more ethnographic and historical information, including on Bāul performative contexts and instruments. Portions of this material have also been published in Cantú, “Bāuls.”

55. For Openshaw’s insightful conceptualization of *bartamān-panthī*, see Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 5 and 113–17.

56. Hak, *Marami Kabi Pāñju Śāh*, 28–31 and 197–200.

57. See Jāhāngīr, *Bāul Gān o Duddu Śāh*.

such as Bhabā Pāglā (d. 1984) and Rāj Kṛṣṇa (1869–1946) as well as independent compositions are at least as prevalent as the songs of Lālan.⁵⁸

Exclusively focusing on or exoticizing the esoteric content of Bāul Fakiri songs runs the risk of overlooking their localized performative and cultural contexts, as Carola Erika Lorea has convincingly argued.⁵⁹ At the same time, I am convinced that it is nevertheless useful to delineate the interplay between esoteric and exoteric at work in the songs, especially since even some of the most popular songs' lyrical symbolism connects to broader discursive currents outside of local Bāul Fakiri tradition proper, and indeed even outside of the wider Bengal region. By “esoteric” I mean that their songs are primarily designed to be interpreted via one's understanding of the esoteric (*bātin* or *bātun*, < Ar. *bāṭin*) content of their lyrical symbolism rather than these lyrics' exoteric (*jāber* < Ar. *zāhir*) surface. This use of esoteric and exoteric is first and foremost a translation, especially since both *bātin* (lit. “hidden”) and *jāber* (lit. “available to all”) are used in Bāul Fakiri songs and conversational discourse as paired emic descriptors of knowledge or gnosis (*jñān*, < Skt. *jñāna*). Indeed, the role of *bātin* and *jāber* in Bāul Fakiri hermeneutics of Sufi symbolism is made abundantly clear in Carol Salomon's *City of Mirrors*, which is one of the most important inspirations for this article.⁶⁰ At the same time, I do not feel that etic usages of “esoteric” and “exoteric” would pose much of a problem in this context either, especially since Islamic currents outside of Bengal have been historically entangled with the field of Western esotericism, the nuances of which are eloquently described by Liana Saif in her contribution to this special issue.⁶¹ I will further

58. For the life and work of these other poets see respectively Lorea, *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman* and Jeanne Openshaw, *Writing the Self*.

59. Carola Erika Lorea, “Playing the Football of Love...,” 417.

60. See especially her translation and annotations to “Mursīder thāi ne nā re tār bhed bujhe” (“What message did the Prophet pass on to this world from one heart to another? Find out from a murshid”), 468–71; and “Nabi nā cinle kise khodār bhed pāy” (“How can you find out the mystery of Khodā without knowing the Prophet?”), 348–51.

61. Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism? Contouring a New Field,” in this present issue.

explore the benefit of clarifying such etic usages in the context of Western esotericism, including modern occultism, in the conclusion.

As an example of an emic mode of esotericism at work, however, consider the more general interplay between “esoteric” and “exoteric” hermeneutics as expressed in the song “Āleph he dāl āhād nūrī,” which not only engages alphabet symbolism or “the science of letters” (*ilm al-ḥurūf*) but also the concept of “Nūr Muḥammad,” or the “Light of Muhammad” as a cosmogonic principle, interpreted in a *bāṭin* mode according to the *dil korān*, the Qur’ān of the heart, rather than textual exegesis of the literal Qur’ān:

Song Three: “Āleph lām mim āhād nūrī”⁶²

Alif, lām, mīm⁶³ – one light.⁶⁴

These three glyphs⁶⁵ have profound⁶⁶ meaning.

Within alif is Allah the Guide.⁶⁷

Within mīm is Muhammad’s Light.⁶⁸

No one makes a meaning for lām.

I understand the dot⁶⁹ has been stolen.

62. The author first received this song from Sādhu Humāyan Fakir in September 2012 CE. A published version of this song can be found in Tālib, *Lālan Śah o Lālan Gītikā*, vol. 2, song no. 2.

63. These are the most common of the “abbreviated letters” (Ar. *muqatta’at*) found above some sūrah’s of the Qur’ān. Their use here is undoubtedly linked to the traditional “science of letters” (Ar. *jafr*), ascribed to the Imām Ja’far and developed by al-Būnī and Jābirian authors (Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 144–45). The version of the song preferred by Sādhu Humāyan Fakir instead gives the glyphs as “alif, he, and dāl,” Humāyan’s version, the *lectio difficilior*, may emphasize additional puns on the meaning of Ahad (see note below).

64. *ahād* (< Ar. *aḥād*) *nūrī*. This is a reference to the name Ahad, which along with its corollary Ahmad is well-attested in Bāul songs as a code to describe Muhammad (Ahmad) as an avatar of Allah (Ahad) with the addition of the Arabic glyph *mīm*. For examples of this see especially Salomon’s annotations in *City of Mirrors*, Song nos. 5, 22, 121, and elsewhere. For the way in which Saiyād Sultān also connected these cosmogonic syllables with the Upaniṣadic sacred syllable *aum*, see Irani, “The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love,” 414–18. According to Azim Sāi, these three letters are a description of the mother’s creation (*ṣṛṣṭi kathā*, cf. Song Four below).

65. *harāḥ* (< Ar. *ḥurūf*).

66. Lit. “heavy,” “weighted.”

67. *allāhādī* (< Ar. *Allah al-Hādī*). This is one of the so-called “ninety-nine names” of Allah.

68. *nūr mohāmmadī* (< Ar. Nūr Muḥammadī). For the cosmogonic connotations of this phrase in Bengali Sufi literature, see Irani, “The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love.”

69. “Dot” translates *nuktā* (< Pers. *noqta*, Ar. *nuqṭa*) throughout, which has a technical sense as a

This song can of course be interpreted through multiple lenses: literally as referring to letters above some *sīrah*s of the Qurʾān; mystically as describing revelations sealed in the heart of the Prophet; cosmogonically as reflecting the cosmic origin of creation; and even sexually since the word for “dot” (*nukṭā*, homologized with *bindu*) is a metaphor for semen. I would argue that only the framework “esotericism” allows for consideration of the fullest range of interpretations.

Bāul Fakiri tradition, despite its centuries-old roots, remains very much alive today, although of course there have been changes due to the educated urban “gentlefolk” (*bhadralok*) construction of the Bāul image as a wandering minstrel.⁷⁹ Indeed, there is often a tension, real or imaginary, between Bāuls as traveling artists and Bāul Fakirs as esoteric practitioners based in a rural *ākḥḥā* “hermitage,” but the two should not be seen as mutually exclusive since both types interact and perform together on a regular basis; indeed, in this context the line between “mere artistry” (*śilpi-tilpi*) and esoteric practice (*sādhanā*) is sometimes so blurry as to be nonexistent. Bāul Fakirs are typically very much aware of technological advances like the Internet, television, and mobile phones, but often have an ambivalent relationship to technology and find creative ways to use these media to their advantage.

As a society Bāul Fakirs are generally decentralized, and authority is organized according to various lines of descent from a guru or murshid (both guru and murshid are used synonymously among Bāul Fakirs). Gurus, their students, and their devotees (*bhaktas*) meet together during periodic gatherings called *sādhusaṅga*, “gathering of adepts,” where formal meals are held and decisions are often made on various issues of interest to the wider community of Fakirs (also called *sādhaks* or *sādhus*) and Fakirānis (also called *sādhikās*). These gatherings are often not only attended by Bāuls but also Hindu Tantric practitioners (*tāntrikās*) and followers of Sufi *pīrs*. More traditional (*āḍī*) adherents to the Lālan-panthī sect or *sampradāy* in Bangladesh – more colloquially called

79. See Urban, “The Politics of Madness,” for a historical overview of this image’s construction.

lalaner ghar, “Lālan’s House” often prefer the title Bāul Fakir or just Fakir (and/or Sāi) as opposed to Bāul in order to emphasize their adherence to only those practices of the Fakiri or Derveshi path that Lālan alludes to in his songs. Other practices, such as those outlined in Tantric literature, are accepted but are sometimes subject to criticism if they are perceived too far outside the scope of Lālan’s House. However, this seems to run contrary to Lālan’s own attitude on the subject, especially since Lālan in at least two songs encouraged devotees to read the Tantras, “whose essence is the Śakti [‘feminine power’],”⁸⁰ and he is believed to have known Śivacandra Vidyārṇava, the guru of John Woodroffe (1865–1936) who lived near Lālan’s *ākhyā* in Kumārkhāli, Kushtia.⁸¹

More senior or devout Bāul Fakirs typically devote themselves fully to memorizing and performing songs, engaging in ritualized prayer or meditation, and practicing techniques for physical and mental control. Poorer Bāul Fakirs often eke out a living through subsistence on alms or by singing popular Bāul songs at large festivals, while more established Bāul Fakirs are financially supported by students and devotees who desire to learn about the deeper aspects of the tradition. Many of the more popular Bāuls in Bangladesh, such as Tuntun Śāh, the late Sādhu Humāyan Fakir, Bidhān Śāh, Balāi Śāh, Bāul Najrul Islām Śāh, Anu Śāh, the late Maolā Baks, the late Badar Uddin Śāh, Bajlu Śāh and the late Abdur Rab Fakir,⁸² come from other vocations such as truck- or rickshaw-driv-

80. *Śakti sar tantra paṇḍo*. This line occurs in the song “Bhajaner nigūṛṅ kathā yāte āche,” published as song no. 376 of Dās and Mahāpātra (eds.), *Lālan-Gitikā*.

81. Carol Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 178. For more on Śivacandra Vidyārṇava see also Pāl, *Tantrācārya Śivacandra Bidyārṇab* and the forthcoming research of Julian Strube on John Woodroffe and collaborations under the alias Arthur Avalon.

82. The author first met each of these artists in early 2011, and has been to most of their houses. Tuntun Śāh at that time was living between Dhaka and Kushtia, to where he had migrated from West Bengal. Previously a lorry-driver, his fame has since skyrocketed and today he regularly performs on national television and is invited to cultural programs in China. Sādhu Humāyan Fakir fought in Bangladesh’s Liberation War (*muktiyoddha*) in 1971, and afterwards decided to live a life of peace as a Bāul Fakir. He was one of my main initial interlocutors for these songs, along with one of his students Bidhān Śāh, who is from Kumārkhāli and became interested in Lālan’s songs after Sādhu Humāyan Fakir paid a visit to Kushtia; he currently

ing, instrument-making, or even military service. Many Bāuls also work and some live a married life, although the nature of the marriage often differs somewhat from its correlate among adherents to the country's orthodox religious groups, especially since marriage among Bāul Fakirs can also be used to consecrate a couple to the practice of *yugal-sādbhanā*, lit. “pair-practices,” which usually refers to sexual rites.⁸³

Worldly attachment is often discouraged by more radical Bāul Fakirs who stress a literal conception of *jyānte-marā*, or “alive-while-dead” that refers to one's liminal relationship with their *saṃsār* (< Skt. *saṃsāra*), a Bengali word meaning “family” that also evokes the Buddhist wheel of worldly existence as it refers to one's household, productive work, reproductive sex, life in society, and so on.⁸⁴ Many senior Bāul Fakirs, such as Azim Sāi, emphasize that not everyone

spends more time in West Bengal. Balāi Śāh handcrafted some of the most wonderful *ektārās* (a one-stringed Bāul instrument, originally called a *gopī-yantra*), and also became a student of Sādhu Humāyan Fakir. He also performed harmonium regularly at Mośārraph Hosen Bhoṭan Guru's well-known “blue room” adjacent to Lālan's own *ākḥṛā* in Cheuriyā, Kushtia. Bāul Najrul Islām Śāh, from Kumārkhālī, is an incredibly talented Bāul artist who plays *dotāra* and *ektāra*; he lives in Jagannathpur near Kushtia but has also traveled to Germany for a cultural program. Anu Śāh's house is in the environs of Kushtia, and he is an ustad of *ektāra/duḡi*, harmonium, and the stringed violin-like *sarindā*. Maolā Baks's hometown (*deśer bari*) was Azampur, and he was known to emphasize a sort of “madman” (*pagal*) or even disruptive approach to the songs and their performative context. Badar Uddin Śāh (a.k.a. Badu Member) was also a veteran of the Liberation War who performed Lālan's songs with a deep voice and sometimes would stand and twirl when performing a song on *ektāra*; we became friends in Dhaka and I had the privilege of visiting his home in the environs of Kushtia. Bajlu Śāh lives in the environs of Lālan's *ākḥṛā* and is known for hosting Bāul artists at his house. Abdur Rab Fakir of Kushtia was deeply involved in Bāul artistry and was an especially formative figure in *dotāra* instrument culture; his student Śaphi Maṇḍal is a famous Bāul performer in Bangladesh and abroad.

83. The term *yugal*, “pair,” “companion,” derives from the same root (*yuj*) as the Sanskrit word *yoga*, lit. “yoking.” The implication seems to be that the companions are yoked together in body and mind. Indeed, according to Azim Sāi and Ferdochi Fakirāni (personal interview, August 2018), *yog sādbhanā* (Skt. *yoga sādbhana*) explicitly refers to *yugal sādbhanā*, not to the yoga of Patañjali or forms of Haṭṭhayoga (at least explicitly).

84. For the classic exemplar of a song treating on Bāul Fakiri initiation see “Ke tomāy e beś bhūṣaṇe” (“Tell me! Who dressed you in these clothes?”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 234–38 and Openshaw, *Seeking Bauls of Bengal*, 133. The song is often performed in Jhaptal, a 10-beat pattern.

is at a stage of life that is conducive to the Fakiri lifestyle (*jīban-dhārā*) or path of initiation (*bhek* or *kḥilāḥpat*, < Ar. *kḥilāfa* “succession”).⁸⁵ The gravity of taking initiation in this context is heightened due to the fact that a main condition of being a Bāul Fakir is usually to give up any intent to have future children. Adopting the Fakiri path with prior children, however, is generally acceptable; for example Sādhu Humāyan Fakir (March 12, 1958 – March 26, 2017, see Figure 1) is survived by at least two daughters, both of whom I had the privilege of meeting on one occasion.⁸⁶ Furthermore, some earlier Bāul Fakirs also seem to have dispensed with this practice altogether, such as Pāñju Śāh of Hariṣpur, Bangladesh, who is known for having children, and some of whose descendants still live at his shrine. Regardless of a given Bāul Fakir’s perspective on child-bearing, children once born are typically loved and highly valued; sometimes children are even cared for by Bāul Fakirs and encouraged to sing Bāul songs from an early age, regardless of their later pursuits in life.

As alluded to above, another feature of Bāul Fakirs is their blending of musical artistry with meditation, prayer, and often sexual rites (*yog-sādhanā*) in a context that seeks to overcome the confines of sectarian religion. The lyrics of Bāul songs accordingly contain Sufi themes or symbols that relate to striving for the attainment (*siddhi*) of embodied self-realization (see Song Four below), and to this end refer to practices as varied as reflecting on cosmology as expressed in terms of the Arabic alphabet (see Song One above) and privately practicing sexual rites derived from medieval Tantric literature and syncretic oral tradi-

85. According to Azim Sāi, an initiated Bāul Fakir, *kḥilāḥpat* can be considered as an advanced “degree” conferred upon the aspirant. The origin of this concept among Bāul Fakirs, however, is obscure, since nowhere in Lālan’s songs is there a mention of *kḥilāḥpat*, which can refer to a twelve-foot-long cloth worn as a turban among some Sufi *ṭariqas*. Instead, in the song “Ke tomāy e beś bhūṣaṇe” there is mention of *ḍor kopini* (or *ḍor kaupin*), a special loincloth that is bestowed to the renunciant; see Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 234–37. Cf. also Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 130–39 for an additional description of *bhek* and *kḥilāḥpat*. According to Carola Lorea (personal correspondence, May 18, 2018), *kḥelkei neojā* is a more common local expression to use than *kḥilāḥpat*.

86. I am grateful to Joyanta Howlader for forwarding me Sādhu Humāyan Fakir’s birth and death dates (*ābirbhāb – tiradhān*).

tion.⁸⁷ Lālan is especially known for his criticism of sectarian religion in his songs, early versions of which were later committed to writing and recorded in the notebooks of the celebrated poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).⁸⁸ It is clear from his songs — and the singers who interpret them today — that Lālan and other Bāuls envisioned a human race free from the social barriers of one’s *jāt*, whether Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, or any other religion.⁸⁹ This radical line of thinking at least partially contributed at the very beginning of the twentieth century to the anthropocentric and humanistic ideals of *bhadralok* intellectuals, particularly Kshitimohan Sen (1880–1960), Tagore, and others, who strove to cultivate an indigenous variety of humanism in the arts and literature of colonial Bengal.⁹⁰

Bāul Fakirs are especially known for their practices that resemble medieval Tantra and/or Haṭhayoga,⁹¹ including smoking cannabis and consuming related herbal substances like *bhām*,⁹² practicing esoteric sexual rites, and engaging

87. For more on Bāul sexual rites (*sādhanā*) see Jeanne Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 203–40. Hers is probably the most developed treatment of this subject — as well as Bāul culture generally — and should be read alongside Salomon’s treatment in “The Cosmogonic Riddles of Lālan Fakir” and the research of Carola Erika Lorea. For a more dated but still relevant treatment see Das, “Problematic Aspects of the Sexual Rituals of the Bāuls of Bengal.”

88. Salomon, “The Cosmogonic Riddles of Lālan Fakir,” 277. A published version of such manuscript sources with an introduction on the relationship of Lālan Fakir to Rabindranath Tagore can be found in Mitra, *Lālan Phakir Kabi o Kābya*.

89. Cf. Lālan’s well-known song “Everyone asks Lālan, what’s your birth-religion” (*sab loke kay lālan ki jāt samsāre*), widely published and translated in a number of sources, including online.

90. See Tagore, *The Religion of Man*.

91. For prevailing scholarship on medieval Haṭhayoga, see the latest findings of the ERC-funded “Haṭha Yoga Project” as well as Birch, “The Meaning of Haṭha in Early Haṭhayoga.” For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Singleton, *Yoga Body*.

92. In Bangladesh, cannabis is not usually consumed directly but is precisely mixed with a tobacco-like dried leaf (*sādā pātā* or *alā pātā*) and ground using a special portable toolkit. The mixture is then placed into a chillum pipe (*bāśī*) and topped by a rolled-up ball of coconut hair (*nārkeler chubā*) that is ignited. This serves to keep the pipe lit as it is passed around. Music usually begins following the consumption of a pipe, the entire ritual of which is called *tāmak sebā* (< Skt. *sevā*, “service,” “serving”). In isolated cases datura and hashish are also consumed in a similar manner, but these are rarely if ever consumed during public performances.

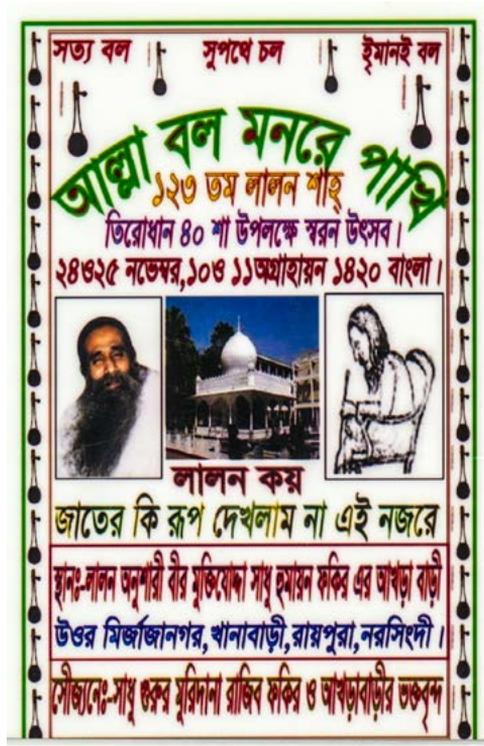


Figure 1. A laminated, official invitation to a festival marking the one hundred and twenty-third year since Lālan Fakir’s (pictured right) death, sponsored by the late Sādhu Humāyan Fakir (pictured left). The large caption in green reads “Say Allah, oh bird of my heart” (*allā bal manre pākhi*) and the caption below the picture of Lālan’s *mājār* or “shrine” reads “Lālan says, “What is the form of (one’s) birth group? I don’t see it with my eyes” (*lālan kay jāter ki rūp dekhām nā ei najare*), which are both lyrics from songs by Lālan Fakir. From the author’s personal collection.

in techniques of *prāṇāyām* (< Skt. *prāṇāyāma*, “control of the vital breath”), more commonly referred to as *damer kāj*, “the work of breath”; *bātāser kāj*, “the work of wind”; and *śvās-niśvās*, “breathing in and out.” In Lālan’s songs a related technique is metaphorically referred to as trapping the *prāṇ-pākhi*, “the bird of the vital breath.”⁹³ Bāul Fakirs use *prāṇ-pākhi* and also other metaphors like *bātās*,

93. Cf. Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song no. 137.

“wind,” to describe the vital breath (*prāṇ*, < Skt. *prāṇa*) in the body, which is homologized with semen (*bastu*, *bindu*, or *nuktā*), connecting their techniques of breath-control to sexual rites. Bāul Fakirs do not use the compound Haṭhayoga (Bengali *haṭha yog*) to describe such techniques, but Carol Salomon has argued that at least some of their sexual rites within the context of *yugal-sādhana* are connected to the practice of *vajrolīmudrā* or “urethral suction,” called *śoṣaṇ bān*, “suction arrow” by Bāul Fakirs, which has a complex history in both Haṭhayoga and Tantra.⁹⁴ James Mallinson has argued that this practice has been described in Tantric literature at least as early as the circa twelfth-century CE Sanskrit text *Amanaska*, where it refers to a technique of seminal retention, possibly using the aid of physical pipes (*nālas*),⁹⁵ but that the etymology of the word *vajrolī* seems to suggest a Tantric Buddhist origin.⁹⁶ In any event, by the time of the circa fourteenth- or fifteenth-century *Śivasāmbhitā*, *vajrolīmudrā* is described in verses 78–104 of the fourth chapter (Skt. *paṭala*) as restraining and reversing the flow of semen during intercourse with a menstruating female.⁹⁷

This usage of *vajrolīmudrā* is relevant to the Bāul Fakiri use of Islamic esoteric symbolism in that, as Salomon has demonstrated, Lālan and other Bāul poets have playfully referred to a strikingly similar practice as *śarīyat*, “Islamic

94. See the annotations to “Dharo cor hāoṃyār ghare phāḍ pete” (“Lay a trap in the house of wind to catch the thief”), in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 336–38. For the best general treatment of this subject, see Mallinson, “Yoga and Sex.” For this practice in the context of Kaula rites with special reference to Bāul Fakirs, see White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 82.

95. At the time of writing it is unclear whether Bāul Fakirs ever have used the aid of pipes in their practice of *śoṣaṇ bān*; no ethnographic treatment that I have read of their sexual rites mention such use nor have any of my informants mentioned this, but it is not impossible.

96. Mallinson, “Yoga and Sex,” 187, 198. Given the Bāul Fakiri roots in Buddhist Sahajiyā movements it is feasible that “Bāul *vajrolīmudrā*” was not mediated by Śaiva Tantras and instead were simply incorporated into Vaiṣṇava and Islamic frameworks via the Buddhist Sahajiyās, although this would require more research to conclusively sort out. The scholar Masahiko Togawa has written a Japanese article on Bāul songs in the context of Buddhist Tantra (“Baul Songs in Bengal and Indian Tantric Buddhism”); this unfortunately could not be consulted for this article but may provide further clues.

97. Maheshananda et al. (eds.), *Śiva Saṃhitā*, 160–67.

law.”⁹⁸ In other words, even *śarīyat* has both a *bātin* and *jāber* meaning, the *jāber* meaning being exoteric Islamic law and the *bātin* meaning something quite different: *śoṣaṇ bān*, a practice very similar to – if not identical with – *vajrolī mudrā* as expressed in some Tantric texts like the *Śivasamhitā*. This is made clear in the following song by Gosāi Cād, translated by Salomon:

Gosai Cad composed this song.
Community, don't forget –
The Prophet won't like it
if you abandon the Shariat...
So maintain the Shariat
and stop the flow of semen.⁹⁹

Salomon further quotes two lines from songs by other Bāul poets that clearly imply Gosāi Cād's lyrics are not an isolated plea for seminal retention but rather a referent to Bāul sexual *sādbanā* more generally. These other sources include the poet Hatem's assertion that “The Prophet [Muhammad] did not accept the Law without the dress of a woman,”¹⁰⁰ and Duddu Shah's injunction to “become a woman in *sādbanā*,”¹⁰¹ both of which indicate when taken together that maintaining the *śarīyat* also implies its correlate: the Bāul Fakiri practice of “becoming a woman” during sexual intercourse.¹⁰² The above lyrics seem to recast in Islamic esoteric terms Śaiva teachings like those expressed in the fourth chapter of *Śivasamhitā*, verse 82, which advocates restraining the *bindu* (semen) by

98. See Salomon's description of the song “Pāre ke yābi nabir naukāte āy” (“Who wants to go to the other shore?”), published in Salomon, “On the Concept of Sharīat in Baul Songs,” 7, and in *City of Mirrors*, 378–81.

99. “Yadi hote cāo āl-momin āge niṣṭhā karo muhammader dīn” by Gosāi Cād, quoted in Salomon, “On the Concept of Sharīat in Baul Songs,” 10.

100. *śarā kabul ney nā rasul meyer lebāj bine*.

101. *sādbane haṇo prakṛti cheṛe puruṣ svabbāb sār*.

102. For more on the sexual aspects of the Bāul Fakiri practice of “becoming a woman,” see the annotations to “Ājab raṇ phakiri sādā sohāginī sāi” (“It's a strange show – the fakir ways of the Sādā Sohāgī saints”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 86–90 as well as the much more detailed and expanded treatment of this practice in Lorea, “Pregnant Males, Barren Mothers, and Religious Transvestism.”

means of the *yonimudrā*, “seal of the vagina.”¹⁰³ This includes a technique for the (male) yogin to meditate on the perineum as a vagina, somewhat similar to the Bāul Fakiri concept of “becoming a woman.” In verse 97 of the same chapter the *yonimudrā* is even mentioned in connection with *sabajolāmudrā*, meaning that — like the Bāul songs above — such a visualization is sometimes to be applied during sexual intercourse.¹⁰⁴

Bāul Fakirs are also known to consume bodily fluids, not only *rajas* “menstrual blood” and semen (both male or female),¹⁰⁵ but also urine and feces — or ritual substitutes for these latter two — as part of a separate practice called the “four moons” (*cāri candra*).¹⁰⁶ Unlike *śoṣaṇ bān*, this practice is not explicitly mentioned in *Śivasambhitā* and may instead be related to similar practices found in Buddhist Tantric or Kaula literature, or among Nāth Yogīs.¹⁰⁷ Regardless of origin, however, the practice as it exists today is inextricable from the songs’ Islamic esoteric symbolism. According to Salomon’s interpretation of Lālan Fakir’s song “Karo re kabul piyālā śuddha imāne,”¹⁰⁸ these four moons are also attributed to four cups (*cār piyālā*), which “represent the four excretions of

103. See Maheshananda et al., *Śiva Sambhitā*, 161 and Mallinson, *The Shiva Sambhita*, 96 for published translations of this verse along with the original Sanskrit.

104. The term *sabajoli* even seems to refer etymologically to the Buddhist concept of *sabaja*, a salient concept in Bāul Fakiri songs, so it is possible that these sexual techniques do not relate to Śaiva teachings at all but rather to Buddhist and (subsequently) Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā techniques, which themselves may have been appropriated by the authors of texts like *Śivasambhitā* and *Haṭhpradīpikā*. In any event, more work is still necessary to examine the precise relationship of Bāul Fakirs to Sanskritic and other vernacular traditions of Haṭhayoga, especially *amarolīmudrā* and *sabajolīmudrā*, which seem just as (if not more) relevant to Bāul *sādhana* than *vajrolīmudrā*.

105. In contrast to the contemporary usage of the English word “semen” as limited to male ejaculate, the words *bij* and *bastu* can also both refer to female “semen.” Cf. Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 65n14 and Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 216–24.

106. See especially Jhā, “Cāri-Candra Bhed: Use of the Four Moons.” I am grateful to Jeanne Openshaw for sharing her translation with me.

107. Cf. Mallinson, “Yoga and Sex,” 198–99. For examples of contemporary scholarship on the Nāth(a) Yogīs, see James Mallinson, “The Nāth Saṃpradāya,” *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism* 3 (2011): 407–28; David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Gordan Djurdjevic, “Masters of Magical Powers: The Nāth Siddhas in the Light of Esoteric Notions” (PhD Diss., The University of British Columbia, 2005).

108. Tālib, *Lālan Śāb o Lālan Gītikā vol. 1*, 313.

the body on the microcosmic level and the four elements on the macrocosmic level,”¹⁰⁹ and are further attributed to four angels, three states of “dissolution” or “annihilation” plus a state of “subsistence in God” (Ar. *fanā’*, *fanā’ fī l-shaykh*, *fanā’ fī l-rasūl*, *fanā’ fī llāh*, and *baqā’ bi-llāh*), four Sufi orders, and four drinks (milk, honey, water, and light).¹¹⁰ It is therefore possible that at least two different sets of practices, the Haṭhayogic “suction arrow” and the Tantric rubric of the “four moons,” were merged by Lālan’s time into the broader framework of what Bāul Fakirs call “yogic practice” (*yog sādhanā*) and were encoded into “secret” (*gōpan*) Islamic esoteric terminology that is still current today among some Bāul Fakiri communities.

Some celibate Bāul artists today – often inspired by Islamic teachings against *kām* (< Skt. *kāma*), “lust” – believe however that Bāul *sādhanā* implies complete seminal retention or even celibacy and will actively attempt to dissuade interested parties from seeking out couples that do practice sexual rituals. As Salomon and others have noted, much of this hinges on fears that the spilling of semen leads to physical decay and death, an assertion that has yet to be scientifically proven.¹¹¹ Such an attitude is also expressed in some Tantric or Haṭhayogic texts like the *Śivasamhitā* (cf. chapter four, verse 88) as well as Buddhist Tantras like the *Kālacakratantra*.¹¹² Other Bāul Fakirs, however, advocate that ejaculation in intercourse ought to be neither restricted nor uncontrolled – the right balance is somewhere in between (i.e. controlled, *suṭal*).¹¹³ It remains unclear therefore whether *śarīyat* implies complete seminal retention or this “controlled” state; perhaps seminal retention is a prerequisite for the “control” of semen, just as in exoteric Bengali Sufism *śarīyat* is seen to be a prerequisite for *mārāḥat*.

109. Salomon, “Cosmogonic Riddles of Lālan Fakir,” 291.

110. Ibid.

111. Cf. Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song no. 33. For a more nuanced treatment of these rites, see *City of Mirrors*, song no. 103.

112. See Wallace, *The Inner Kālacakratantra*, 63.

113. I am grateful to Azim Sāi for this insight (personal conversation). This accords with Openshaw’s excellent treatment of the triad *tal*, *atal*, and *suṭal* in the context of sexual *sādhanā* in her *Seeking Bauls of Bengal*, 214–16.

Finally, Bāul Fakirs are often considered heterodox or even “outside” (*bāhire*) all forms of society since they do not limit their songs’ content to any single religion’s doctrines; many of them actively utilize Buddhist Sahajiyā,¹¹⁴ Hindu (Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā,¹¹⁵ and to a lesser extent Śaiva and/or Śākta), Sufi,¹¹⁶ and indigenous metaphors to construct a path of embodied self-realization.¹¹⁷ This innovation, along with the songs’ celebration of human divinity and sexuality as we have seen — possibly rooted in materialist (*bastubādī*) Carvaka or Lokāyata beliefs¹¹⁸ — has brought Bāul Fakirs condemnation from both Hindu and Muslim religious leaders alike. Bāul Fakirs have been framed as *apasampradāy* or “heterodox sects” by some Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava (*baiṣṇab*) authors who see their

114. For the construction of this category see Dasgupta’s dated but still useful overview in *Obscure Religious Cults*, 3–109. The main literary corpus of the Buddhist Sahajiyās is the Caryāpad, believed by some scholars to be composed in Old Bengali. Buddhist Sahajiyās appear to have gradually converted to Vaiṣṇavism or Sufism, and it does not appear that any communities persist in Bengal any longer; cf. the legend of 1,200 Buddhist *nerās* or “shaveling” ascetics being initiated into Vaiṣṇavism quoted in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 227.

115. For excellent analyses of this tradition with references to its link to Bāul Fakiri songs see Hayes, “*The Necklace of Immortality*” and Hayes, “*Eroticism and Cosmic Transformation as Yoga*.” For an overview of the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā textual corpus see Czyżykowski, “Selected Aspects of the Textual Studies on the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Tradition in Medieval Bengal.” The classic text on the subject remains Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon*. Dasgupta in *Obscure Religious Cults*, 113–87 also connects Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā doctrines to the doctrines of Bāuls, who are problematically romanticized in the style promoted by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore.

116. One of the earliest attempts to connect the Bāul Fakirs to Sufism, problematically described as “essentially a cult of love-mysticism,” is found in Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 171–73.

117. This path is inextricably related to memorizing Bāul Fakiri songs, which also serves to establish seniority — the more songs one has memorized, the more one is able to participate in musical debates related to a given song’s religious or poetic “direction” (*dik*), debates which take the form of “question” (*praśna*) and “answer” (*uttar*). Some songs contain more meaning since they were composed for more advanced practitioners (the analogy given to me by Azim Sāi was comparing the subjects one would learn at primary school to those at a university), and thus there is some consideration of quantity versus quality. The *bhāb* or “attitude” with which one expresses these songs is also important since subtle gestures and vocal tones reveal the amount of time that one has spent in the *sādhū-saigha* or “company of aspirants.” For more on the performative aspects of Bāul songs see Lorea, *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman* and Capwell, *The Music of the Bāuls of Bengal*.

118. See Carola Erika Lorea’s mention of these historical movements being important to Bengali scholars like Śakti Nāth Jhā in her article “Playing the Football of Love...”: 420–21.

teachings as corrupt understandings of the sixteenth-century reformer Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s teachings.¹¹⁹ Likewise, as early as 1926 an Islamic ruling (Ar. *fatwā*) was issued against the Bāuls which singled out Lālan Fakir, today considered to be Bengal’s greatest folk poet and even a national hero of sorts among Bangladeshis, as “the number one foe, a spy for the Ārya Samāj,”¹²⁰ and called for the destruction of the Bāul tradition.¹²¹ Conditions have been improving for Bāul Fakirs in recent years, but many obstacles to their free expression nevertheless remain. Their practices still face persecution in many regional contexts, especially in some areas of rural Bangladesh where Bāul Fakirs are sometimes still considered to be a threat to reformist Islamic groups. In extreme cases Bāul Fakirs have been known to unite in protest against the coercion of these groups, and in so doing often obtain support from urban intellectuals, artists, and university students.¹²²

As is evident from the above overview, then, Bāul Fakirs remain very difficult to categorize using traditional scholarly methods, and several lenses are required to adequately describe their teachings and practices. I would argue that the lens of Islamic esotericism — as well as esotericism more generally — offers one of the most important modes of making sense of their multifaceted identities, since it is clear that attempting to literally interpret their lyrics would lead to a superficial conception at best. In other words, the framework of esotericism allows for an appraisal of the songs’ Islamic Sufi content without Islamizing the

119. For the construction of Vaiṣṇava “normativity” against Sahajiyā traditions that also inform Bāul Fakiri songs see Lorea, “Sectarian Scissions, Vaiṣṇava Deviancy, and Trajectories of Oral Literature” and Wong, “Against Vaiṣṇava Deviance.”

120. This allegation is especially ironic given that the main leader of the Ārya Samāj, Dayānanda Sarasvatī, held a hardline vision of Hinduism that is entirely incompatible with the attitude toward religion as expressed in Lālan Fakir’s songs. For more on Dayānanda Sarasvatī see his numerous biographies and Scott, *Spiritual Despots*.

121. Salomon, “The Cosmogonic Riddles of Lālan Fakir,” 268. See also Caudhuri, *Bāul Dhvaṃśa Phatojā o Anyānya* and Jhā, *Bāul Dhvaṃśa-Andolaner Itibytta*.

122. See for example the article “Bauls unite to protest assault” published in the Bangladeshi newspaper *Daily Star*, April 30, 2011, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-183804>. I had the opportunity to attend this protest in the company of Sādhu Humāyan Fakir.

tradition on literal grounds. On the other hand, defining Bāul Fakirs only in relation to their Vaiṣṇava- or Buddhism-inflected lyrics (i.e., with only a thin veneer of Sufism) fails to do justice to the rich intercontinental history of the songs’ Islamic themes.

“Fakir,” “Dervish,” and the Outer Limits of Bengali Sufism

Since it has now been established that Bāul Fakirs do not limit their ranks to members of any single religious tradition, it is now necessary to analyze the way in which Sufi Islamic content should be interpreted within this broader non-sectarian framework. A great starting point to examine this is Lālan’s own relationship to Sufi mysticism through his own title “fakir” (*phakir*, < Ar. and Pers. *faqīr*, lit. “poor”), although this can be problematic since some Hindu singers are also known to use this title. The origin of Sufi fakirs in Bengal has been the subject of a book-length study by David Cashin, who is especially attentive to the presence of fakirs in Sufi literature composed in Middle Bengali and their interactions with other prevailing religious groups on the scene in medieval Bengal.¹²³ As Carol Salomon initially pointed out, the title “fakir” among Bāul Fakirs appears to be inextricably entangled with the history of Vaiṣṇava “shaveling” (*nerā*) fakirs.¹²⁴ Given such entanglement and the impossibility of separating Islamic aspects of Bengali fakirs from non-Islamic ones, it seems more productive to here devote more attention to examining the title of Lālan’s guru, Dervish Sirāj Sāi.¹²⁵

Lālan always referred to Sirāj Sāi as a dervish (*darbeś*, < Pers. *darvīsh*) in his songs, but to my knowledge never used the title to describe himself. Lālan’s

123. Cf. Cashin, *The Ocean of Love*.

124. See an analysis of Salomon’s treatment of the “shavelings” in Cantú, “Theurgy and the Snake,” 23–28.

125. Sources do not agree on the precise identity or dates of Dervish Sirāj Sāi, and there are multiple claims to his *samādhi* or final resting place. In 2015 I visited one such shrine in Harishpur, near the *samādhi* of Pāñju Shah. While not conclusive, it seems likely that Dervish Sirāj Sāi and Pāñju Shah were from the same general milieu of mystic poets and thus more work should be done to compare the two. While no songs of Sirāj Sāi appear to survive, many of Lālan’s Islamic esoteric ideas seem to accord with those expressed in the literature of Pāñju Shah.

bhaṇitā or “signature line,” if it even gives a title instead of a diminutive or humorous adjective, only ever has “fakir” or the honorific “sāi” (< Skt. *svāmī*, “swami”) before or after his name (e.g., Lālan Fakir or Lālan Sāi). From this it can be assumed that the title “dervish” connoted a specific level of attainment that is separate from — but at the same time somewhat linked to — “fakir,” especially since Sirāj Sāi is Lālan’s guru after all. Among some Bāul Fakirs there is a quadripartite division of *Āul-Bāul-Darbes-Sāi*, each referring to a different yet



Figure 2. Azim Sāi and Ferdochi Fakirāni, two contemporary Bāul Fakirs, originally from Muslim families, who regularly perform the songs of Lālan Fakir and other Bāul poets. Photograph by the author, taken in Santiniketan in August 2018, with Ferdochi’s consent to publish.

intersecting type of Bāul Fakiri community. According to Carola Erika Lorea, these may be connected in some contexts to the four stages of progress current among some Bāul Fakirs (e.g. *sthūl-prabarta-sādhak-siddha*), although nowhere does such a link appear to be systematized.¹²⁶ On the other hand, in a personal interview with Ferdochi Fakirāni (August 2018) this quadripartite scheme was used not to indicate a progression but to distinguish Bāul practice as separate from the path of Fakirs and Dervishes, yet such a distinction may reflect the success of Vaiṣṇava orthodox attempts to distinguish these as four different *apasampradāys*, especially if such an attitude is held even by Bāul Fakirs within the tradition. Although resolving this question of titles is outside the scope of this paper, we can be fairly certain that the title Sāi appears in all contexts to connote a more advanced status than the rest. At the same time, I would argue that its use in apposition to *darbeś* (as in Dervish Sirāj Sāi) warrants independent examination of what it means to be a *darbeś* in Bengali contexts.

While the title dervish in Persian contexts can refer more generally to any Sufi aspirant, it appears to have a much more technical connotation in Bengali that assists in our analysis. The scholar Enamul Hak wrote that Bengali “dervish-hood” (i.e., attaining the title of *darbeś*, or the variant spelling *darbbeś*) indicated an especially advanced stage of Sufi practice that emphasized “the practical aspect of gnosis” and required “knowledge in nine subjects.”¹²⁷ These subjects are outlined in a poem titled *Darbeśī Mahal* “Dervish Palace” in the *Talināmā / Śabdāulāpīranāma* of Śekh Cād, a poet who lived in Comilla (in modern Bangladesh) during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries CE and who composed numerous mystical (*maramjya*) works with Islamic content.¹²⁸ The nine subjects are as follows:

126. Carola Erika Lorea, personal correspondence with the author, May 18, 2018.

127. Hak, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, 414.

128. For a recension of *Talināmā* see Śarīph, *Bāṅglār Sūphī Sāhitya*, 41–86.

- 1) the discernment of the dervishes (*darbbeś*),
- 2) the worship of Khodā (God),
- 3) the discourses on subtle bodies (*tan*),
- 4) the essence (*tattva*) of the self,
- 5) the essence of mental examination (*dilere dekbhan*),
- 6) the subject of the subtle nerves (*nādi*),
- 7) the location of semen (*bindu*),
- 8) familiarity with the six subtle centers (*ṣaṭcakra*),
- 9) that which is called “Brahmatattva.”¹²⁹

Given the technical meaning attached to such a title, it is highly probable that Dervish Sirāj Sāi would have been assumed to be generally competent in the above nine forms of knowledge, engaging extensively in this “practical aspect of gnosis” that included an eclectic blending of Sufism with Hindu and Buddhist Tantric forms of meditation and yoga. Shaman Hatley has written an excellent survey of how some actors on the other end of this blend were likely Nāth Yogīs, and that more broadly “Bengali Sufis transform the technologies of body-centered *sādhana* into means for *tanḥid*, the egoless absorption into pure awareness of the presence of God.”¹³⁰ While Hatley’s overall thesis is well-grounded in primary sources and provides the best means available to understanding this historical exchange, he also appears to support David Cashin’s problematic assertion that it is possible to neatly separate Islamic texts as being of either “Nāthist” or Vaiṣṇava provenance.¹³¹ Salomon, approaching this question from the perspective of her scholarship on Bāul Fakirs, strongly disagrees with such an exclusivist approach in her own review of Cashin’s book, noting especially that it “for the most part discounts exogenous Sufi influence.”¹³² I would further argue that it is precisely by analyzing Islamic esoteric themes in Bāul Fakiri

129. Hak, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, 415. This is my own personal translation with assistance from Nandini Abedin at the University of Washington. Enamul Hak had provided the original Bengali for this list, but did not state the source from which it came.

130. Hatley, “Mapping the Esoteric Body,” 367.

131. David Cashin, *The Ocean of Love*, 40.

132. Carol Salomon, “Review of ‘The Ocean of Love,’” 555.

lyrics that evidence for “exogenous Sufi influence,” predating Lālan’s lifetime, emerges; see for example the integration of Maṅṣur Hallāj — a figure who has no Tantric equivalent — into the song “Āmi ki tāi jānile sādhan siddhi hay,” which also introduces the concept of a “murshid” or “guide” and the idea that the locus of truth is the self:

Song Four: “Āmi ki tāi jānile sādhan siddhi hay”¹³³

What am “I”¹³⁴ — if that is known
then my striving will be complete.
The meaning of the word “I” is profound.
In me there is no more “I.”¹³⁵

In the endless market¹³⁶ of the city
they shout “I,” “I!”
Not thinking about my own “I,”
I read scripture almost like a madman.

This Mansur Hallaj Fakir¹³⁷
had said, “I am the truth!”¹³⁸
This is approved as the Lord’s¹³⁹ law,
but can its meaning be found in the Sharī’a?

133. The author first received this song from Sādhu Humāyan Fakir. Published versions of this song include: Tālib, *Lālan Śab o Lālan Gitikā*, vol. 1, song no. 101; Dās and Mahāpātra, *Lālan-Gitikā*, song no. 255.

134. *ami*. I have translated this first-person pronoun literally so as to preserve the original sense of the song in Bengali.

135. According to Azim Sāi, this phrase (*āmāte ār āmi nāi*) refers to phānā (< Ar. *fanā*), “dissolution,” “annihilation.” See Song Two above.

136. *ananta bajāre*. Alt. trans. “in the eternal marketplace,” “many marketplaces.”

137. This is Maṅṣur Hallāj, who was executed in 922 CE. He is famous for proclaiming in Arabic *anā l-ḥaqq*, “I am the Truth” (Bengali: *āmi satya*). See Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song 107 for another reference to Hallāj in the songs of Lālan Fakir. It is notable that Lālan here refers to Hallāj as a fellow “fakir.”

138. *āmi satya*.

139. “Lord” translates *sāi*, which here as elsewhere is ambiguous since it could refer to the Supreme or to Dervish Sirāj Sāi, Lālan’s guru.

“By my will, arise.” “By God’s will, arise.”¹⁴⁰

The Lord’s command

is that these two “I”-s be partners.¹⁴¹

Lālan says this riddle is revealed

at the teacher’s abode.¹⁴²

Importantly, these considerations are not limited to a single text, i.e. the *Darbeśī Mahal*. The wider scope of this “dervish-hood” is reflected in a relatively large corpus of surviving Middle Bengali texts (including, among many others, such works as the *Nabi-Baṁśa* of Saiyad Sultān,¹⁴³ the anonymous *Yoga Kalandar*

140. *kumbe ejni kumbejnillā*. This line is a transliteration of Arabic according to Azim Sāi and Ābu Tālib. I have therefore translated this line from the Arabic phrases *qum bi’idni* and *qum bi’idnillah*, which appear to make the most sense in this context, and for which “will” seems to be a best translation. While obscure, Tālib supplies a helpful footnote in *Lālan Śāh o Lālan Gītikā*, vol. 1, 338 (translation my own): “*kum be ejni* – Arise and live at my command (*bukum*); *kum be-ijnillah* – Arise and live at Allah’s command. Here the poet wants to say that there is no difference between my command and Allah’s command. This is because the devotee (*bhakta*), when he has destroyed his ‘I’-ness (*phāna*) in unity (Ar. *waḥdanīyāt*), that is, when he is able to be merged with Allah’s essence (*baqā*), then there is no more duality.” Tālib in his interpretation seems to read too much of an orthodox Sufi opinion into Lālan’s lyrics, however, especially since he was known for his attempt to Islamize Lālan’s biographical details and lyrics (cf. Salomon, *Cosmogonic Riddles*, 269). Furthermore, Salomon in *City of Mirrors* notes that Lālan “rejects *nirvana*, total absorption in God, since complete non-duality would mean that the adept could not experience the bliss of union” (170). She goes on to explain that instances like these where he seems to have espoused a non-dualistic position are therefore probably more reflective of a position akin to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *acintyabhedabhedā*, “unimaginable difference and non-difference.” Cf. Holdredge, *Bhakti and Embodiment*, 305–6 for a philosophical comparison of this position with Vedānta and Pātañjalayoga.

141. *hīlā*. According to Azim Sāi, the word is synonymous with *sahakāri*, a “companion” (the precise relationship is undefined, and could be guru/disciple, lovers, parent/child). However, *hīlā* could also point to a legal rule that allows a divorced woman to enter into an interim marriage, known as a *hīlā* marriage. In any event, it seems to be used as a metaphor to describe the way in which the “I” of the fakir is paired with the “I” of Allah, as in the previous line.

142. *murśīder thāy*. “Murshid” (lit. “guide”) in Bāul songs is used synonymously with “Guru” and can refer to either a human teacher or an inward spiritual guide.

143. A version of this text was published in the two volumes of Śarīph, *Saiyad Sultān viracita Nabībaṁśa*. Ayesha Irani has recently analyzed this text for her dissertation and in several illuminating articles on its historical and cosmogonic features.

(attributed to Saiyad Martujā),¹⁴⁴ the *Jñāna Sāgar* of Āli Rajā / Kānu Fakir,¹⁴⁵ the *Nūrnāmā* of Mīr Muhammad Saphī,¹⁴⁶ the *Jñāna Pradīp*,¹⁴⁷ and the *Ādya Paricaj* of Sekh Jāhid¹⁴⁸) that all reflect the historical interaction of Islamic esoteric teachings with Hindu and Buddhist yogic traditions in South Asia in previous centuries.¹⁴⁹ Śarīph in particular seems to have captured this syncretic process in Bengal most succinctly, and argues that it directly contributed to the very creation of the Bāul tradition:

It was not possible for all the Sufi adepts that entered India to avoid being swayed by India's spiritual doctrines (*tattva*) and practices (*sādhana*). The locals also who were initiated by them were unable to leave their previous traditions of non-dualist thought and yogic precepts. It is believed that at that time the now-diminished Buddhist society's "yogic-*kāya-sādhana*" doctrines were still current among these people. As a result, Sufi Islam was able to strike a compromise with the path of yoga and other prevailing paths of spiritual *sādhana*. As harmony with Sufism increased, in the course of time the Sahajiyā and Bāul traditions were also created as a result.¹⁵⁰

As Hatley puts it, Bengali Sufism "adapted to itself the basic template of the yogic body as formulated by the Nātha cult and reconfigured it within the parameters of Indo-Islamic thought."¹⁵¹ This template is most concisely expressed

144. For the most comprehensive study of this text to date that includes a French translation see Bhattacharya, "Un Texte Du Bengale Médiéval." See also Mukharji, "The Flame and the Breeze," 234–64. For a published MA thesis that includes an English translation and a comparative survey of the text see Cantú, *Theurgy and the Snake*. Versions of this text were also published by Enamul Hak and Āhmad Śarīph.

145. See Śarīph, *Bānglār Sūphī Sabītya*, 404–530 for an edited version of this text.

146. Cf. Irani, "The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love," 422–23 for a brief analysis of this text.

147. Śarīph attributes this text to Saiyad Sultān, but Ayesha Irani has expressed skepticism as to whether this is the case. Cf. Irani, "The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love," 420n107. A published version of the text is found in Śarīph, *Saiyad Sultān viracita Nabibāṇṣā*, vol. 2, 571–660.

148. See Jāhid, *Ādya Paricaj*.

149. For the wider scope of this interaction outside of Bengal the reader is referred to the scholarship of Carl Ernst, especially "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series 15, no. 1 (April 2005): 15–33.

150. Śarīph, *Bānglār Sūphī Sabītya*, ā [Bengali notation for page ii] (personal translation from Bengali).

151. Hatley, "Mapping the Esoteric Body," 353.

in the Bāul Fakir concept of *debatattva*, “doctrine of the body,” which is summarized by their teaching “whatever is in the universe is in the receptacle of the body” (*yā āche brahmāṇḍe tāi āche ei deba bhāṇḍe*).¹⁵² Just as in early modern Hindu yogic literature of a Tantric provenance the external universe is seen to be embodied in *cakras*, *kuṇḍalinī*, and subtle physiology,¹⁵³ so in Bengali Sufi literature one finds the terms *mokām* (< Ar. *maqām*) “station” and *mañjil* (< Ar. *manzil*) “abode” that mark “the progressive passage of the wayfarer along the Sufi path (*tariqāh*),” and that are also attributed “to four cosmological spheres (*‘ālam*).”¹⁵⁴ There are also hybrid Sufi texts that explicitly refer to bodily *cakras* in relation to astrological zodiac signs, such as the poem “Wheel of the Signs” (*Rāṣī Cakra*) in the text *Jñāna Pradīp* (“Lamp of Gnosis,” for references see above). Yet the Sufi contribution to the Bāul Fakiri concept of *debatattva* is perhaps most strongly reflected in ritual manuals like the *Yoga Kalandar*, in which these internal *mokāms* (*nāsut*, *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, and *lābūt*) are further correlated with archangels (respectively Azrael, Israfil, Michael, and Gabriel) that rule the four quarters and cardinal directions.¹⁵⁵ In Bāul songs a fifth *mokām*, the *lā mokām*, is sometimes added to these four, which is described in Islamic esoteric terms as the abode of a feminine principle of light, attributed to Fatima as the primal mother (*ādya mātā*) and the Śakti.¹⁵⁶ This is made clear in the song “Bal re sei maner mānuṣ konjanā,” which alludes to the cosmogonic *mokām* of nothingness (*lā*) as the abode of a feminine principle of light:

152. Cf. Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 61 and Salomon, “Baul Songs,” 193.

153. Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 157–62. This is also discernible in the literature of Śrī Sabhāpati Swāmī (b. 1840), who ascribes astrological phenomena such as planets and zodiac signs to various *cakras*.

154. Hatley, “Mapping the Esoteric Body,” 355.

155. See Cantú, *Theurgy and the Snake*, 38–45 and the annotations to “Jān gā nūrer khabar” (“Go and learn about the light”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 288–91.

156. For Fatima’s role in Bāul cosmogony as synonymous with the Śakti see Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song nos. 7, 9, 61, 90, 114, and 116. Cf. especially Salomon, “Cosmogonic Riddles,” 286–87 and Salomon *City of Mirrors*, 208–12 for her role in the context of the *pak pañjātan*, or “five holy people,” who are the “preexistent forms of Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain,” homologized with the five classical elements that surround a star or peacock.

Song Five: “Bal re sei maner mānuṣ konjanā”¹⁵⁷

Say, who is this person of the heart?¹⁵⁸
Mother adores her husband,^{159 160}
and the Master¹⁶¹ says to her, “Mother.”

Who is primal,¹⁶²
who is worthy,
in whose love will one be bound?
Who sends forth the supreme principle¹⁶³
that does not abide in scriptures?¹⁶⁴

When the two become as one,
Fruit is formed without a flower.
Again uniting,¹⁶⁵
they create the person of the heart.¹⁶⁶

157. The author first received this song from Farida Yasmin Ratna in Shahbagh, 2011 C.E., and it has been cross-checked by Bidhān Śā and several others since. A published version of this song can be found in Phakir Ānoyār Hosen, *Lālan-Saṅgīt*, vol. 1, song no. 26.

158. “Heart” translates *man* (< Skt. *manas*), which also can refer to the mind as situated in the region of the heart. According to Azim Śāī, there are three parts that come together to form the *maner mānuṣ*, which are the same as the three letter “glyphs” (*haraph*) in Song Two and the three “qualities” or Sanskrit *gūnas* that comprise Prakṛti or “primordial materiality” in Saṃkhyan, Vedāntic, and some schools of Hindu tantric metaphysics.

159. “Husband” translates *pati* (< Skt, lit. “lord,” often an epithet for Hindu male deities). This song and several others by Lālan seamlessly blend Hindu and Islamic vocabulary.

160. Alt. trans. “The husband adores the Mother,” “Mother and her husband adore each other.” The syntax is (perhaps purposefully) ambiguous.

161. “Master” translates *Mawla* (*maōlā*, < Pers. *mawla*, lit. “lord,” “master,” “judge”), here an epithet for the Supreme.

162. *ādya*, also an epithet for the Śakti.

163. *param tattva* (< Skt. *paramatattva*).

164. “Scriptures” translates *bed* (< Skt. *veda*). In Bāul songs *bed* can refer to either Hindu or Muslim religious texts.

165. *milan*, a term that is used widely in many of Lālan Fakir’s songs.

166. *man-janā*. Alt. trans. “person of the heart.”

In a station that is not,¹⁶⁷
 there is the Lady of Light.¹⁶⁸
 The first mother, the form of Zohura.¹⁶⁹
 Lālan says I yield in surrender¹⁷⁰ —
 my fortune has not yet unraveled.

Despite clear evidence of Islamic esoteric symbolism as mediated through Bengali Sufism, it must equally be stressed that these “cults” or “traditions” should never be seen as mutually exclusive, especially since all evidence points to great fluidity between “Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā,” “Nāth,” and “Sufi” identities in Bengal during the pre-modern period.¹⁷¹ Indeed, by the nineteenth century this fluidity reached such a climax that Lālan Fakir could assert that Bāul Fakirs were independent of mainline Sufism and entirely outside of the four main *ṭarīqas* (Chishtiyya, Qādiriyya, Suhrawardiyya, and Naqshbandiyya) that each lead in the “wrong direction.”¹⁷² Later Bāul Fakirs continued to broaden the scope of the titles “fakir” and “dervish” beyond their conventional attachment to either Sufi *ṭarīqas* or branches of the Nāth *sampradāy*. One main point of departure from Sufism is the assertion that Allah and Muhammad are both considered to be avatars (*avatārs*),¹⁷³ and another is that Allah created with the assistance of a feminine principle, the Ahlādiniśakti, who is homologized with Rādhā as

167. *lā mokām* (< Ar. *la maqām*), which in Bāul songs is often equated with the *sahasrār cakera* (< Skt. *sahasrārācakera*) or “thousand-petaled lotus.” See Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song no. 61 for the role of the *mokāms* in Lālan Fakir’s songs. Here *lā mokām* is appended to the usual quadripartite set that includes *nāsūt* (< Ar. *nāsūt*, “human nature”), *mālkuūt* (< Ar. *malakūt*, “the heavenly world”), *jabrut* (Ar. *jabarūt*, “spiritual power”), and *lābut* (< Ar. *lābūt*, “divine nature”), and which are associated with four stages, elements, and angels according to their role in the *Yoga Kalandar*. Cf. Keith Cantú, *Theurgy and the Snake*, 38–54.

168. “Lady of Light” translates *nūrī*, which is here equated to the Śakti.

169. *jaburi* (< Ar. *al-ḡabrāʾ*), an epithet of the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima.

170. *bināj kari*. Alt. trans. “remain humble,” “passively await.”

171. Cf. Salomon, “Review of ‘The Ocean of Love,’” 555.

172. Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, song no. 18: “Come on! Let’s follow the Prophet’s faith” (“Āy go yāi nabir dīne”), 108–11.

173. See the song “Apārer kāṇḍār nabiji āmār” (“My Prophet is the pilot to the other shore”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 40–43.

the *hlādinī-śakti*, the bliss that is intrinsic to Kṛṣṇa’s essential nature (*svarūpa*) in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cosmology.¹⁷⁴ Their most remarkable point of departure, however, seems to be their continued rejection of any sectarian religious identity based on birth-group (*jāt*); while some Bāul Fakirs recognize the religion of their parents as a kind of cultural ethnicity, they themselves most often state their identity as “human” (*mānuṣ*) and their supreme guru as the human being (*mānuṣ-guru*). This position also marks a point of departure from contemporary Nāth leaders, such as Adityanāth of the Gorakhpur monastery in Uttar Pradesh,¹⁷⁵ as well as from Vaiṣṇava leaders of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, who seem to promote an explicitly Hindu identity.

Conclusion

As should be evident, Islamic esoteric content in Bāul Fakiri songs can be directly traced to a Sufi “Derveshi” milieu that existed for centuries prior to the lifetime of Lālan Fakir in the nineteenth century CE. As a result, it would be a mistake to assume that the presence of Sufi symbolism in Lālan Fakir’s lyrics is simply a mere veneer for Buddhist or Hindu Tantric ideas. More work is necessary to establish the relationship in particular of Pāñju Śāh with Lālan Fakir, since, as noted earlier, Pāñju’s writings and songs on Sufi themes seems to have at least partially informed the latter’s lyrics.

It has not been possible in this article, however, to give a comprehensive historical treatment of the full range of esoteric symbolism in Bāul Fakiri songs, the analysis of which spans numerous religious and linguistic groups and often defies sectarian categorization. At the same time, I think that the presence of readily identifiable referents in Bengali Bāul songs, especially those attributed

174. Barbara Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*, 35; cf. 72–73. For the Ahlādinīśakti in Lālan Fakir’s songs see “Āche āllā āle rasul kale” (“Allah is in the original place, Muhammad is in the machine”) in Salomon, *City of Mirrors*, 60–61.

175. For the historical incorporation of Islamic ideas within the Nāth *sampradāy*, see the research of Simon Digby in general and in particular Véronique Bouillier, “Nāth Yogī’s Encounters with Islam.”

to Lālan Fakir, does allow such symbolism to be historicized and integrated into a broader framework in order to be made mutually intelligible to scholars across a range of disciplines and fields. Esotericism provides one of the best available frameworks given its *a priori* recognition — in the word “esotericism” itself — that there are exoteric and esoteric modes of interpreting texts and, in this case, songs in oral and manuscript form.

In an Islamic context, at least, the fact that some Bāul Fakirs emically used Bengali derivatives of the Arabic terms *bāṭin* and *ẓāhir* should go a long way in combating pessimism as to the applicability of using “esoteric” and “exoteric” as a working model when analyzing Bāul Fakiri songs. This is especially the case since we know Lālan was aware of the tradition of *taphsīr* (Ar. *tafsīr*),¹⁷⁶ or commentaries on the Qur’ān, and appears to have extended such a system of hermeneutics to his own songs.¹⁷⁷ As we have seen, this esoteric symbolism extends to domains as diverse as Sufi recitation (*jbikar*, < Ar. *dhikr*) in Song One, the idea of “dissolution” or “annihilation” (*phānā*, < Ar. *fanā*) in Song Two, the “abbreviated letters” (Ar. *muqatta‘āt*) of Song Three, deconstructing the pronoun “I” in Song Four, and cosmogonic speculation and the “Person of the Heart” in Song Five. The song lyrics also unabashedly blend this method of hermeneutics with referents to secret (*gupta*, *gopān*) Tantric and yogic sexual rites, as evident from Lālan’s aforementioned “espousal” of *śarīyat*, clearly proving that Islamic esoteric terminology could be and was utilized to conceal and interpret practices usually demarcated as Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, or even Tantric Buddhist.

In concluding this article, it is useful to further analyze the possibility of using esotericism as a discrete “-ism” that derives from the academic field of West-

176. In the song “Mursīder thāi ne nā re tār bhed bujhe” (“What message did the Prophet pass on to this world from one heart to another? Find out from a murshid”), Lālan mentions the mysterious *taphsīr boseni* (Tafsīr Hosnī), which Salomon (*City of Mirrors*, 470) speculates “may have been written in ‘code,’ that is, in a cryptic style termed *ishārāt* (pl. of *ishāra*, Bengali *isāra*) in order to veil the truth, which is too dangerous to express openly.”

177. See Feras Hamza, “Locating the ‘Esoteric’ in Islamic Studies,” for the importance of such a tradition to Islamic esotericism.

ern esotericism, which has its own historical roots and trajectories. There has been an ongoing discourse as to what constitutes this field ever since Antoine Faivre opened the floodgates with his landmark publication *Access to Western Esotericism*, itself a translation of two French volumes, the first of which appeared in 1986. Indeed the position, severe as it is, that there is no other form of esotericism apart from Western does appear to be historically viable if one squarely locates the origin of the academic field in Faivre's *l'ésoterisme occidentale*. At the same time, while recognizing this origin, I do not feel that future scholarship on esotericism need be unambiguously tethered to Western domains,¹⁷⁸ so long as reductive applications of the word “esotericism” are avoided and the rationale for such a use is justified. Indeed, the reader will already find an excellent analysis for Faivre's own allowance of Islamic esotericism in Liana Saif's aforementioned contribution to this volume, entitled “What is Islamic Esotericism?,” and her arguments for the creation of such a field need no repeating here.¹⁷⁹ In addition to Islamic esotericism, I see the conceptual framework of esotericism more broadly as a useful academic lens that could help to situate the doctrines of Bāul Fakirs in not just their Islamic but also their South Asia-specific contexts. Gordan Djurdjevic has already argued when considering other forms of South Asian traditions like the Nāth Yogīs and modern occultists that “esotericism and the occult should be treated as conceptual and regional rather than ontological and exclusively Western categories and that it consequently ... makes sense to operate with the concept of Indian esotericism.”¹⁸⁰ While my own methodology is primarily historical, I also think that this conceptual move makes sense as long as care is taken not to reduce the doctrines of Bāul Fakirs

178. This is a position argued by the recent piece by Roukema and Kilner-Johnson, “Editorial: Time to Drop the ‘Western.’”

179. The wider history of this discourse is outside the scope of this paper, and the reader is also referred to the published works of Wouter Hanegraaff, Henrik Bogdan, Marco Pasi, Olav Hammer, Gordan Djurdjevic, Egil Asprem, Manon Hedenborg-White, and Julian Strube for a taste of the varied conceptualizations at play.

180. Djurdjevic, *India and the Occult*, 2.

to some kind of perennial esoteric “Tradition.”¹⁸¹ Keeping their cultural (anti-)specificity in mind, I am convinced that further analysis of Bāul Fakirs through the lenses of esotericism is productive for two overarching reasons.

The first reason is that the publication of an article like this is greatly assisted by the field’s commitment — if only partially realized — to producing non-essentializing, rigorous histories of “rejected” currents of knowledge,¹⁸² and I think that this commitment can be usefully extended beyond its explicitly Western focus. These rejected domains are often undermined in other mainstream disciplines, including Islamic Studies or South Asian Studies, yet are often deeply valued by adherents to these beliefs and practices. Until these more area- or religion-specific fields “catch up” to the importance of esotericism and the study of its rejected currents as a model, it can only increase the profile of Western Esotericism for it to adopt some of these movements as bedfellows, as awkward and sometimes historically convoluted as the fit may be.

The other, and perhaps more daring, reason that Bāul Fakirs could be profitably considered through the lenses of esotericism is that the universalizing tendencies of at least some modern occultists can potentially shed light on a similar tendency among Bāul Fakirs, especially Lālan Fakir. While acknowledging the brutal history of colonialism, its aftermath, and the Orientalizing — that is, “othering” in a Saidian sense — behavior of many Western actors, I would argue that Western identity can also be a two-edged sword that grooms its own dissidents. For example, the post-Saidian scholar Saree Makdisi portrays the anti-slavery Romantic poet William Blake (1757–1827) as one such dissident figure throughout his book.¹⁸³ I think this can be extended to other exceptional individuals, since acceptance of a Saidian kind of Orientalism — or indeed, of what Makdisi calls the Occidental Imperative that led

181. For the treatment of Traditionalism and its critique see Mark Sedgwick’s classic *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. Liana Saif in her contribution to this issue also deftly analyzes Traditionalism and its project as it pertains to twentieth-century authors on Sufism.

182. Cf. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

183. Makdisi, *Making England Western*.

to an orientalizing tendency — was not equally shared among all figures in the field of Western Esotericism. Indeed, the modern occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), himself a huge admirer of Blake, strongly critiqued the “Oriental” fascination of his day while at the same time incorporating Śaiva yoga, Sufism, Buddhism, Jewish and Christian Qabalah, and even Daoism into his all-encompassing curriculum of Thel-emic Magick.¹⁸⁴ The Bavarian occultist Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) also exhibited a similar tendency, even viewing Rosicrucian lore as a kind of “Yoga-Philosophy.”¹⁸⁵ While there is no evidence that the above occultists had any knowledge whatsoever of Lālan Fakir, there is still the glaring fact that such openness to eclectic categories of religious practice — what Faivre in his aforementioned work termed the “Praxis of the Concordance”¹⁸⁶ — is also typical of Bāul Fakirs, whose indigenous brand of anthropocentric universalism was made explicit in Lālan Fakir’s own songs but has yet to be as exhaustively studied as the former. As I have demonstrated above, Lālan, through the medium of written and oral song rather than published text, also incorporated religious symbols and practices from disparate traditions — not only Islamic Sufi but also Hindu Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Buddhist, Christian, and, as one Bengali scholar has even argued, Daoist¹⁸⁷ — into a dizzying web of interchangeable correspondences. The symbolism in these songs was intended to be applicable to all people (*sab loka*), with an allowance for different behaviors in different countries (*bhinna deśe bhinna bhābe*).¹⁸⁸ While it would be quite absurd to label Bāul Fakirs as “Eastern occultists,” I find it striking nevertheless that their overall approach does

184. For Crowley’s humorous swipe at Orientalism see his *Eight Lectures on Yoga*, 13. For a well-researched treatment of Crowley’s idiosyncratic views that defy categorization as either politically to the “left” or “right,” see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*. For a collection of writings centered on his academic reception in the field of Western Esotericism, see Bogdan and Starr, *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*.

185. Hartmann, “The Principles of the Yoga-Philosophy,” 99–134.

186. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 14.

187. Bhaṭṭācārya, *Bāṅglār Bāul o Bāul Gān*, 523–28.

188. See Song Two above, as well as his classic “Sab loka kay lālan ki jāt saṁsāre” (“Everyone asks Lālan, ‘What in the world is your birth religion?’), published in almost every compilation of Lālan’s songs and widely performed.

approximate the cultural relativity espoused by many modern occultists as well as other adherents to new religious movements, whether explicitly or implicitly.

In any event, esotericism's sharp focus helps further ground such comparative analyses within the context of a received history of discrete religious practices without having to resort to problematic claims as to the existence of a perennial religion. For example, while keeping in mind obvious differences between occultists and Bāul Fakirs, who were operating worlds apart and in widely varying socio-economic classes, there is historical evidence of limited exchanges as early as 1929 via the journal *Kalpaka*.¹⁸⁹ Bāul Fakiri practices were also indirectly integrated into the discourse of modern occultism in 1973 with the publication of Kenneth Grant's (1924–2011) *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*, which cited both Manindra Mohan Bose's dated but groundbreaking analysis of the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās,¹⁹⁰ as well as S. B. Dasgupta's classic *Obscure Religious Cults* in the context of Tantric sexual rites.¹⁹¹ While Grant's treatment does not appear to explicitly include any consideration of these rites' Islamic esoteric dimensions as articulated by Bāul Fakirs, it is notable that these two sources – both of Bengali provenance – have also been periodically consulted by academic scholars, including Salomon, who have subsequently recognized the inextricable interplay between Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā and Bengali Sufi movements with regard to sexual rites.¹⁹² The presence of such sources lurking in this type of occult literature underscores the important role that esotericism can play in helping scholars connect the historical dots between widely disparate traditions and their reception in literature across the world.¹⁹³

189. The journal *Kalpaka* (quoted in Bogdan, "Reception of Occultism in India," 184) described the "Vauls" or "aborigines of Bengal" as following the doctrine "do what thou wilt" as perceived to be the central teaching in both the Bhagavadgītā (Skt. *yathā icchasi tathā kuru*) and Crowley's writings.

190. Bose, *The Post-Caitanya Sabajiyā Cult of Bengal*.

191. Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*, 61 and 118. I am grateful to Zeke Swango for first bringing these references to my attention.

192. Both of these sources are found in the bibliography to Salomon, "Cosmogonic Riddles."

193. For example, see Hedenborg-White, "The Other Woman" for a thoughtful treatment on the impact of Tantric practices on gender in Grant's contemporary occultism. If her analysis is correct, however, it is notable that Grant did not perceive the fact that in a Bengali context

Finally, it was just prior to Grant’s publication that Bāul artists also entered the Western cultural orbit more broadly, even if most westerners in the 1960s did mistake them for Eastern hippies.¹⁹⁴ The exchange was circular; on the one hand, Pūrṇa Dās Bāul (b. 1933) was introduced by the band manager Albert Grossman (1926–1986) to Bob Dylan (b. 1941), Garth Hudson (b. 1937), and the Band at Bearsville in New York around 1967, and is reported to have considered Bob Dylan as “sort of a Bāul.”¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, the famous Beat poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) had met Pūrṇa Dās Bāul’s father while traveling in India in the early 1960s and was later even inspired to write a humorous poem entitled “After Lalon” that riffed on Lālan Fakir’s *bhānitā* or signature, replacing “Lālan says” for “Allen Ginsberg says.”¹⁹⁶ The extent to which these twentieth-century artists cared to recognize the Islamic esoteric dimensions of Bāul Fakiri songs is still an open question. Nevertheless, such exchanges more broadly illustrate these songs’ popular capacity to disrupt conventional definitions of Western and Eastern, including among their diverse audiences and supporters, who continue to be attracted to such openness.¹⁹⁷ Amid this cultural fluidity, the songs’ Islamic and other forms of esoteric content persist through time, simmering beneath their performative surface and lingering even when the music stops. Perhaps it is time to pay attention to the silence as well.

not only menstrual blood but also semen can be produced by biological females (see the above treatment on sexual fluids, especially note 105).

194. For mention of this see Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 3–4 and 86.

195. Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*, 86. For the details of this meeting see Macbeath, “Looking Up Dylan’s Sleeves.”

196. Ginsberg and Foley, “Same Multiple Identity: An Interview with Allen Ginsberg.” In a further example of circularity, Ginsberg was no stranger to at least some currents of modern occultism, either. Ginsberg appears to have attended a Gnostic Mass funeral organized for his friend and once roommate Harry Smith (1923–1991), a celebrated thelemite artist and collector of American folk music; see Wasserman, *In the Center of the Fire*, 20.

197. Consider Parvathy / Pārbaṭī Dās Bāul (b. 1976), a student of the late Sanātan Dās (a well-known Bāul from West Bengal, and a primary source for Carol Salomon), who holds international lectures and retreats in which participants around the world learn about Bāul Fakiri *sādhana*. Bāul Fakirs from Kushtia, Bangladesh also are given teaching roles in her retreats.

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Original Bengali Recensions

Song One:¹⁹⁸

পড় মুখে¹⁹⁹ সদাই²⁰⁰ লা ইল লা হা ইল লা লা²⁰¹
আইন বেজিলেন²⁰² রাসুল উল্লা²⁰³ ।।

লা ইল লা হা²⁰⁴ নফি সে হয়
ইল লা লা হু²⁰⁵ দিন²⁰⁶ দয়াময়
নফি এসবদ²⁰⁷ যাহারে²⁰⁸ কয়
সে²⁰⁹ তো এবাদত উল্লা²¹⁰ ।।²¹¹

নামের সহিত রূপ

ধিয়ানে²¹² রাখিলে²¹³ জপ

198. Witnesses: SHF: Oral version received from Sādhu Humāyan Fakir; LGS: Āhamad, *Lalan Gīti Samagra*, song no. 584; JHA: Jhā, *Lalan Sāi-er Gān*.

199. পড় মুখে] SHF; মুখে পড় রে LGS, JHA.

200. সদাই] SHF; সদা LGS; সদায় JHA.

201. লা ইল লা হা ইল লা লা] SHF; লাইলাহা ইল্লাল্লা LGS, JHA.

202. বেজিলেন] SHF; ভেজিলেন LGS, JHA.

203. রাসুল উল্লা] SHF, JHA; রাসুলুল্লা LGS.

204. লা ইল লা হা] SHF; লাইলাহা LGS; লা ইলাহা JHA.

205. ইল লা লা হু] SHF; ইল্লাল্লা সেই LGS; ইল্লাল্লাহু সে JHA.

206. দিন] SHF; দীন LGS, JHA.

207. এসবদ] SHF; এজবাত LGS; এসবাত JHA.

208. যাহারে] LGS; জাহারে SHF; এহারে JHA.

209. সে] SHF, JHA; সেই LGS.

210. এবাদত উল্লা] SHF, LGS; এবাদত-উল্লা JHA.

211. This antarā is the third antarā in LGS and the second in JHA. I have translated according to the order in SHF.

212. ধিয়ানে] LGS; দিয়া নিয়ে SHF; absent JHA.

213. রাখিলে] SHF; রাখিয়ে LGS; absent JHA.

বে-নিশানায়²¹⁴ যদি ডাক
চেনবি²¹⁵ কি রূপ কে²¹⁶ তোর²¹⁷ আল্লা ।।

লা-শরিক²¹⁸ জানিয়া তাকে²¹⁹
পড় কালাম²²⁰ দেলে মুখে²²¹
মুক্তি পাবি থাকবি²²² সুখে²²³
দেখবি রে²²⁴ নূর তাজেল্লা²²⁵ ।।

বলেছেন²²⁶ সাঁই আল্লা নূরি²²⁷
এই ঝিকর²²⁸ দরজা ভারি
সিরাজ সাঁই কয় এই²²⁹ ফুকারি
শুন²³⁰ রে লালন বেল ইল্লা²³¹ ।।

214. বে-নিশানায়] LGS; বে নিশানায় JHA; বেনি সানাই SHF.

215. চেনবি] SHF; চিনবি LGS, JHA.

216. কে] SHF, LGS; সে JHA.

217. তোর] SHF; absent LGS, JHA.

218. লা-শরিক] LGS, JHA; লা সরিক SHF.

219. তাকে] LGS; থাকি SHF.

220. কালাম] SHF, LGS; এ নাম JHA.

221. মুখে] LGS, JHA; মুখি SHF.

222. পাবি থাকবি] SHF, LGS; পাবে থাকবে JHA.

223. সুখে] LGS, JHA; সুখি SHF.

224. দেখবি রে] SHF, LGS; দেখতে পাবে JHA.

225. নূর তাজেল্লা] SHF, LGS; নূর-তাজেল্লা JHA.

226. বলেছেন] SHF; বলেছে LGS.

227. নূরি] SHF; নূরী LGS. Whole line absent JHA.

228. ঝিকর] SHF; জেকেরের LGS, JHA.

229. কয় এই] SHF;তাই কয় LGS, JHA.

230. শুন] SHF; শোন LGS, JHA.

231. বেল ইল্লা] SHF; বে-লিল্লা LGS; বেলেল্লা JHA.

Song Two:²³²

আপনার আপনি ফানা হলে
তারে ²³³ জানা যাবে
কোন নামে ডাকিলে তারে
হৃদাকাশে উদয় হবে ।।

আরাবি ²³⁴ ভাষায় বলে আল্লা
পারশিতে হয় খোদাতালা ²³⁵
গড বলেছে ²³⁶ যিশুর ²³⁷ চেলা
ভিন্ন দেশে ভিন্ন ²³⁸ ভাবে ।।

আল্লা হরি ভজন পূজন
এই ²³⁹ সকল মানুষের সৃজন
অনামক অচেনাই ²⁴⁰ কখন ²⁴¹
বাগেন্দ্রিয় না সম্ভবে ।।²⁴²

মনের ভাব প্রকাশিতে

232. Witnesses: BS: Oral version received from Bidhān Śā and cross-checked with fakirs. LGS: Āhamad, *Lālan giti samagra*, song no. 282.

233. তারে] BS; সে ভেদ LGS.

234. আরাবি] BS; আরবী LGS.

235. পারশিতে হয় খোদাতালা] BS; ফারসীতে কয় খোদাতালা LGS.

236. বলেছে] BS; বলিছে LGS.

237. যিশুর] BS; যীশুর LGS.

238. ভিন্ন] BS; ভিন LGS.

239. এই] BS; এ LGS.

240. অচেনাই] BS; অচিনায় LGS.

241. কখন] BS; বচন LGS.

242. LGS This *antarā* is switched with the third.

ভাষার উদয় ত্রিজগতে ²⁴³
মন আদিত্তে ²⁴⁴ অধর ²⁴⁵ চিনতে
ভাষা বাক্য নাহি পাবে ।।

আপনাতে আপনি ফানা
হইলে হবে তারে ²⁴⁶ জানা
সিরাজ সাঁই কয় লালন কানা
স্বরূপ রূপে ²⁴⁷ দেখ সংক্ষেপে ²⁴⁸ ।।

Song Three:²⁴⁹

আলেফ ²⁵⁰ লাম মিম ²⁵¹ আহাদ নূরী
আছে ²⁵² তিন হরফের মর্ম ভারী ।।

আলেফে ²⁵³ হয় আল্লা-হাদি ²⁵⁴
মীমেতে ²⁵⁵ নূর মোহাম্মদি ²⁵⁶

243. ত্রিজগতে] BS; এই জগতে LGS.

244. মন আদিত্তে] BS; মনাতীত LGS.

245. অধর] BS; অধরে LGS.

246. হইলে হবে তারে] BS; হলে তারে যাবে LGS.

247. রূপে] BS; রূপ LGS.

248. সংক্ষেপে] BS; সংসারে LGS.

249. *Witnesses*: SHF: Oral version received from Sādhu Humāyan Fakir; LSOLG: Tālib, *Lalan Śāh o Lalan Gitikā*, vol. 2, song no. 2; AS: Oral version preferred by Azim Sāi.

250. আলেফ] আছে আলিফ LSOLG.

251. লাম মিম] LSOLG, AS; হে দাল SHF.

252. আছে] SHF; absent LSOLG.

253. আলেফে] SHF; আলিফে LSOLG.

254. আল্লা-হাদি] SHF; আল্লা হাদী LSOLG.

255. মীমেতে] SHF; মিমে LSOLG.

256. মোহাম্মদি] SHF; মুহাম্মদী LSOLG.

লামের মানে কেউ করেনা ²⁵⁷

নূজা বুঝি হলো ²⁵⁸ চুরি ।।

নব্বই হাজার কল্‌মা ²⁵⁹ জারি ²⁶⁰

নবীর উপর ²⁶¹ করলেন বারি ²⁶²

তিরিশ ²⁶³ হাজার শরিয়ত ²⁶⁴ জারি ²⁶⁵

ষাট হাজার ভেদ বুঝতে ²⁶⁶ নারী ²⁶⁷ ।।

সিরাজ সাঁই বলে রে লালন

আগে নূজা ²⁶⁸ করো ²⁶⁹ নিরূপণ

নূজা নিরিখ না হলে ঠিক ²⁷⁰

থাকবে না আর কাট কাচারি ²⁷¹ ।।

257. করেনা] SHF; করলে না LSOLG.

258. হলো] SHF; হল LSOLG.

259. কল্‌মা] LSOLG, AS; কালাম SHF.

260. জারি] SHF; জারী LSOLG.

261. উপর] SHF; সংগে LSOLG.

262. বারি] SHF; বারী LSOLG.

263. তিরিশ] LSOLG; ত্রিশ SHF.

264. শরিয়ত] SHF; শরীয়ত SHF.

265. জারি] SHF; জারী LSOLG.

266. বুঝতে] SHF; বুঝাইতে LSOLG.

267. নারী] SHF; নারি LSOLG.

268. আগে নূজা] AS; নূজার আগে SHF, LSOLG.

269. করো] SHF; কর LSOLG.

270. না হলে ঠিক] AS; ঠিক হবে যখন LSOLG; সঠিক যখন SHF.

271. আর কাট কাচারি] SHF; তো কোট-কাছারী LSOLG.

Song Four:²⁷²

আমি কি তাই জানিলে ²⁷³ সাধন সিদ্ধি হয়
আমি কথার ²⁷⁴ অর্থ ভারি
আমাতে আর ²⁷⁵ আমি নাই ²⁷⁶ ।।

অনন্ত শহর বাজারে ²⁷⁷
আমি আমি শব্দ করে
আমার আমি চিন্তা নারে ²⁷⁸
বেদ পড়ি পাগলের প্রায় ²⁷⁹ ।।

[যখন না ²⁸⁰ ছিল স্বর্গ মর্ত্য ²⁸¹
তখন কেবল আমি সত্য
পরেতে হইল ²⁸² বর্ত
আমি হইতে তুমি কায়]²⁸³

মনছুর হাল্লাজ ফকির ²⁸⁴ সে তো

272. Witnesses: SHF: Oral version received from Sādhu Humāyan Fakir; LSOLG: Tālib, *Lālan Śāb o Lālan Gitikā*, vol. 1, song no. 101; LG: Dāś and Mahāpātra, *Lālan-Gitikā*, song no. 255.

273. জানিলে] SHF; জানলে LG, LSOLG.

274. কথার] SHF; শব্দের LG, LSOLG.

275. আমাতে আর] SHF; আমি সে তো LG, LSOLG.

276. নাই] SHF; নয় LG, LSOLG.

277. শহর বাজারে] SHF, LG; শহর-বাজারে LSOLG.

278. আমি চিন্তা নারে] SHF; খবর নাই আমারে LG; কি তাই চিনলে পরে LSOLG.

279. বেদ পড়ি পাগলের প্রায়] SHF, LG; অচেনারে চেনা যায় LSOLG.

280. যখন না] LG; নাহি LSOLG.

281. স্বর্গ মর্ত্য] LG; স্বর্গ-র্তম LSOLG.

282. হইল] LG; হইলে LSOLG.

283. This *antarā* is omitted in SHF and was not translated for this article.

284. ফকির] SHF, LG; ফকীর LSOLG.

বলেছিল²⁸⁵ আমি সত্য
সই পেলো²⁸⁶ সাঁইর²⁸⁷ আইন মত
শরায় কি তার মর্ম পায় ।।

কুম বেইজনি কুম বেয়েজনিগ্লা²⁸⁸
সাঁইর হুকুম দুই আমি হীলা²⁸⁹
লালন বলে এ ভেদ খোলা
আছে রে মুর্শিদে²⁹⁰র ঠায় ।।

Song Five:²⁹¹

বল রে²⁹² সেই মনের মানুষ কোনজনা
মা করে পতি ভজনা
মাওলা²⁹³ তারে বলে মা ।।

কেবা আগ্য কেবা সাধ্য
কার প্রেমেতে হয়ে বাধ্য
কে পাঠাল²⁹⁴ পরম তত্ত্ব
বেদে নাই যার ঠিকানা ।।

285. বলেছিল] SHF, LG; জেনেছিল LSOLG.

286. সই পেলো] SHF; সেই প'লো LG; সেই পেল LSOLG.

287. সাঁইর] SHF, LSOLG; সাঁইয়ের LG.

288. কুম বেইজনি কুম বেয়েজনিগ্লা] SHF, LG; কুম বে-ইজনী, কুম বে-ইজনিগ্লা LSOLG.

289. হীলা] SHF, LG; হেগ্লা LSOLG.

290. মুর্শিদে²⁹⁰র] SHF; মুরশিদ LG, LSOLG.

291. Witnesses: FYR: Oral version received from Farida Yasmin Ratna and crosschecked with Bidhān Śā; LS: Hosen, *Lālan-Saṅgī*, vol. 1, song no. 26.

292. বল রে] FYR; বলরে LS.

293. মাওলা] FYR; মওলা LS.

294. পাঠাল] FYR; জানালো LS.

একেতে দুই হল যখন
ফুল ছাড়া হয় ফলের গঠন
আবার তারে করে মিলন
সৃষ্টি করলেন মনজনা²⁹⁵ ।।

লা মোকামে²⁹⁶ সেই যে নূরী
আগ্ন্য মাতা²⁹⁷ রূপ জহরী
লালন বলে বিনয় করি
আমার ভাগ্যে ঘটল না ।।

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295. মনজনা] FYR; মন্জনা LS.

296. লা মোকামে] FYR; লা-মোকামে LS.

297. আগ্ন্য মাতা] FYR; আগ্ন্যমাতা LS.

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