THE INFLUENCE OF LĀLAN'S *MANER MĀNUṢ* ON R. N. TAGORE'S WRITINGS

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Abstract: Lālan is an unknown Bengali philosopher, socialist, and literary figure. Although this unknown philosopher was not academically educated, his songs had a profound influence on Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was influenced not only by Lālan's songs but also by his attire and mystical philosophy. This article urges us to explore the intertextual and textual influences of Lālan's and Tagore's literature and the shared philosophy they held. Whatever the theoretical explanation of Lālan's maner mānuṣ (man within) or Tagore's Jīvana Devatā (*man-divinity), its truth lies in the depth of realization*— "maner mānuṣ maner mājhe karo anveṣaṇa," i.e., we need to quest the maner mānuṣ (man within) or the divine within us. *Rabindranath Tagore has been influenced by Lālan's melodies, lyrics, and spiritual-philosophical thinking, which will also be discussed and analyzed in this article.*

Lālan[1] was a multi-talented person. His non-communal attitude is perhaps found in very few people. Rabindranath Tagore was a devotee of Lālangīti[2]. We get to know it through his poetic talent or musical talent. Inspired by Lālangīti (in a broad sense, Bāul songs), he composed approximately 66 songs. However, it cannot be denied that it was Rabindranath's hand that made Lālangīti more popular in the educated-cum-civil society. Earlier, these songs were limited to the marginalized people of Bengal. Although these two talented individuals share similarities, they also differ in their thinking. For example, the philosophical thinking of Lālan began with man, while Rabindranath's philosophy ended with man.

When Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born, Lālan (1774-1890) was about eighty-seven years old. Geographically, both were born in the same milieu, but economically, on opposite ends of the spectrum. Lālan was the son of a poor, famine-stricken, exploited, and deprived family. On the other hand, Tagore was born in a famous zamindar family. It is difficult to say whether Rabindranath ever met Lālan face to face, though that was not impossible. At the end of 1890, with responsibilities for the manors, Rabindranath Tagore came to Shiladah in Khushtia. Before this, he had also visited Shiladah with Jyotirindranath Tagore in 1872 and 1875. According to many scholars, during this period Rabindranath met Lālan. His name is also found in Lālan's song, which is underlined in the line below:

Pāre yadi yāvi <u>ravī</u>
Gurura caraṇa bhulo nā

But there have been many controversies among researchers regarding the meeting between Lālan and Rabindranath. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Lālan's philosophy and *Bāul* influenced the thinking of Rabindranath. Tagore commented on Lālan and also used his songs in the novel *Gora (1910)*. At the beginning of the novel, we see a Bāul dressed in a cloak, standing in front of a shop, and singing:

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[1] To find out more about Lālan's biography, you can see pages 54 to 67 of the book *Mahatma Lalon Fakir Sri Basanta Kumar Pal* (2nd reprint from Gangchil, Kolkata in 2016), edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury.

[2] The songs are written and composed by Lālan, known as Lālangīti. In this article, all the songs of Lālan are written with the diacritical marks wherever applicable in Bengali pronunciation.

Khā̃cāra[3] *vitara acina pākhi kemane āse yāya*
Dharate pārale manobeḍi ditema pākhira pāya

It means—how does an unknown bird come and go in the cage? / If I could catch it, I would put my mind's shackles around its feet. And also in the *Jibansmriti* book, Rabindranath mentioned the above two lines and said:

> I have noticed, the Bāul songs keep narrating the same thing… (Tagore 1368: 115).

Therefore, we should take up Lālan's philosophy and virtuous path. In this regard, Tagore says:

> The thoughts of this Lālan Fakir have been created by a thing which is consistent with the dictums of Muslim, Hindu, and Jaina, where there are so many things to be thinking of. Everyone should think about it (Choudhury, 2014, p. 68).

Rabindranath Tagore, who first collected *Lālangīti,* preserved these in the Museum of Visva-Bharati.[4] While Rabindranath came to Shilaidah to fulfill his obligations to his manors, a couple of months later, Lālan had passed away. But Lālan left a group of disciples and composed several songs. Later, Rabindranath came closer to his disciples and was fascinated and impressed by the melody and content of *Lālangīti*. Some things about Lālan's philosophy that Rabindranath liked most: the social reforms, going beyond religious customs and rituals, a simple, ardent exploration that formlessness is in *formness*, and unbounded is in the bounded matter. Rabindranath termed *the philosophy of our people* because the thoughts of Lālan support the lives of common people. That is why we can say that Lālan's philosophy is called Lokāyata dharma darśana, or the religious philosophy of common or marginalized people. Rabindranath has sincerely acknowledged his philosophy. He said in the introduction of *Haramani*:

> Those who read my writing knew I had expressed my affections for Bāul, which was published in my many writings. When I was in Shilaidah, I used to meet and talk to the Bāuls. I took the tune of Bāulgāna and knowingly or unknowingly coincided it with its melody in a large number of my songs. From this, it can be understood that sometimes the melodies and messages of Bāulgāna easily blended in my mind (Mansuruddin, 1337, p. 1).

And he hints at his persistent and sincere choice and thereby is inclined towards the marginalized people:

> I have mentioned with my personal experience with some songs which I had often heard from wandering village singers, belonging to a particular sect of Bengal, called Bāuls, who have no images, temples, scriptures or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity in man, and express for him an intense feeling of love. Coming from unsophisticated men, having a simple life in obscurity, gives us a clue to the inner meaning of all religions. For it suggests that these religions are never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality (Tagore, 1966, pp. 83-98).

[3] In Bengali, the term *khā̃cāra* means the cage. But Lālan, in his song, takes this term as the human body.
[4] To know in detail Rabindranath's collections about Lālan, see pages 70 to 73 of Abul Ahsan Choudhury's book *Rabindranather Lālan*.

Rabindranath's song "*āmāra sonāra bāṅalā*/ *āmi tomāya bhālovāsi*," i.e., the national anthem of Bangladesh, is composed by the same tune as Lālan's disciple Gagan Harkara's song: "*āmi kothāya pāvo tare*/ *āmāra maner mānuṣ ye re."* Not only has Rabindranath taken the melodies of songs from the contemporary marginalized people, but also undoubtedly accepted the messages and philosophies of songs of these people. If we want to discuss the songs of these marginalized people and Rabindranath, we also have to discuss Lālan and Rabindranath. We must remember one thing— Rabindranath's intimacy with the philosophy and songs of these marginalized people is mainly through *Lālangīti* and the philosophy of Lālan. Nobody else could have had such an impact on the mind of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore comprehended the words, terms, and melody of Lālan thoroughly, but did not accept the pursuit of anatomy or the body-centric practices. So, he presented Lālan's philosophy towards a civil society without *kāyā sādhanā* (body-centric or esoteric practices). That is why many regretfully said, 'Rabindranath stained some *māyāñjana*' (the myth on Lālan's pursuit) (Bandhopadhyay & Roy, 2015, pp. 281-282). However, it is undeniable that the tune and philosophy of Lālan were reflected in the songs of Rabindranath as well as in his thought. The concept *maner mānuṣ* of Lālan was revealed in Rabindranath's Hibbert speech at Oxford and also in the seventh chapter of his book *The Religion of Man*. Lālan's *maner mānuṣ* (*man* within) has subsequently appeared in the thought of Rabindranath as *Jīvana Devatā* or 'man-divinity'. In the fifteenth number of *Patraput* (1936), we can see that Rabindranath has drawn an exploration of Lālan's *maner mānuṣ*:

Katadina dekhechi odera sādhakake
Ekalā prabhātera rodre sei padmānadīra dhare,
* * * * * *
* * * * * *
Dekhechi ekatārā hāte caliche gānera dhārā veye
Maner mānuṣer sandhāna karavāra
Gabhīra nirjana pathe (Tagore, 1402, pp. 643-647)

That means that many days I have seen one of their devotees singing with a monochord in hand on the bank of the Padma River. That devotee searches for *maner mānuṣ* or the divine in an individual soul, on a solitary path. "*Khā̃cāra vitara acina pākhi/ kamane āse yāya*"— this song of Lālan has drawn a deep impact on the psychological state and the writings of Tagore as well. Lālan uses these metaphors to convey the idea that the divine essence is within each person, urging a deep, personal quest for spiritual truth. This song is also the main inspiration for Tagore's mystic lifestyle. In this regard, Sukumar Sen remarks that "...this song inseminates i*nitiation seed* in Tagore's poetic mind" (Choudhury, 2014, p. 74). Sashibhushan Dasgupta also says, "there is an impressive congruence with the life-quest of Rabindranath and this questing song of Lālan" (Choudhury, 2014: 74). In this context, we have seen in *Gitanjali* that Tagore emphasizes that discovering the divine within oneself aligns with modern spiritual practices that focus on mindfulness and inner growth. And he speaks of the divine presence within the self and the importance of connecting with this inner essence as a source of true fulfillment (Tagore, 1913, p. 23).

Lālan is always absorbed in searching for the divine soul. And in the divine soul has been finding the humanity of human beings. For him, the notion of humanity has great importance. Hence, he can easily say that the traditional religious systems create conflicts among people. The religion of humans united with the divine soul is called humanity, which is the theosophical identity of the human soul. In his words:

Yāra have sei divyajñāna
Sehi dekhate pāya (Khan, 2007, p. 365)

That is, those who realize that theosophical knowledge in itself can enable them to see the *divine*. The connotations of this dictum can be found in Tagore's writings. He searches the

infinite light into the limited soul. From another perspective, he seeks existence in the realm of the infinite. And in infinity, it searches for the existence of its soul. The amount of joy being absorbed is *divine*. So, he imprinted that melody and rhythm of aspiration in his writings:

Sīmāra mājhe asīma tumi
Bā̃jāo āpana sura
Āmāra madhye tomāra prakāśa
Tāi eta madhura (Tagore 1913: 140)

That means the infinite is in finite beings; as we are finite beings, so the manifestation of the infinite is in us. In Rabindranath's *Gitanjali*, if we breathe deeply in the nest of spirituality, then we can find that the continuation of Lālan's philosophy is in his sophistical writings. Lālan's philosophical thinking is rooted in mysticism and the realization of *maner mānuṣ*. His philosophy emphasizes that true knowledge of the divine comes from self-realization rather than through religious rituals. Lālan's mysticism is characterized by a focus on the inner self and the realization of the divine presence within. Rabindranath Tagore's thinking is characterized by a profound integration of the divine with the human experience. His work reflects a belief in the interconnectedness of all existence, in which the divine is immanent in the natural world and in human life. Tagore's philosophy is not about transcending the material world but about searching for the divine within it. He sees spirituality as an integral part of everyday life, blending the spiritual with the mundane (Tagore, 1931, pp. 48-50).

Lālan's philosophy is about amenity and is strategically non-egocentric. Surrender ourselves to the feet of the *Guru* and make him divine, as this is extensively given importance in the songs, pursuits, and philosophy of Lālan. He also conceives the Gurus as divine souls. That is what we also hear from the words of Rabindranath Tagore:

Tumi kemana kare gāna kara ye, guṇī
Avāka haye śuni kevala śuni (Tagore, 1913, p. 18)

That is, how thou sing, my Master! being wonder, I am only listening and listening. And,

Āmi kevala tomāra dāśī
Kemana kare ānava mukhe tomāya bhālovāsi (Ibid., p. 373)

In the process of pursuit, Lālan's theology does not hold that people need to go to forests, mountains, or Mecca-Kāśī to seek God or a divine presence; likewise, his spirit-disciple, Rabindranath Tagore, sought the glory of God or a divine soul in people. As we hear in Lālan's voice:

Nirākāre jyotirmaya ye
Ākāra sākāra hailā se
Yejana divyajñānī haya, sehi jānate pāya
Kali yuge hala mānuṣ avatāra (Khan, 2007, p. 365)

That means, which is incorporeal, fulgent, and can be *formless* and *shapeless*. Hence, those who are theosophists know, even in the present era, that man is God or the incarnation of the *divine.* On the other hand, Rabindranath Tagore highlighted Lālan's philosophy at a much higher level. It seems to us that Tagore himself decently and brightly upheld Lālan's philosophy and thought. According to him, the *divine* exists in humans and humanity. In his words:

Bhajana pūjana sādhana ārādhana

Samasta thāka paḍe
Ruddhadvāre devālayera koṇe
Kena āchisa ore (Tagore, 1913, p. 119)

In the passage above, the poet argues that all forms of worship should be abolished and that one need not visit temples or mosques. Because, to him, as God is in man, man should worship as deities. Rabindranath writes:

Rūpasāgare ḍuva diyechi
Arūpa ratana āśā kari
Ghāṭe ghāṭe ghurava nā āra
Bhāsiye āmāra jīrṇa tarī (Ibid., p. 87)

That means there is a formless jewel within ourselves. So, he thinks he does not go out, only hopes to find that formless jewel within himself. Lālan sang in the tune of his monochord and rhythm:

Rūpera ghare aṭala rūpa vehāre
Ceye dekhanā torā (Khan, 2007, p. 449)

That is, Lālan says everyone should see; aṭala rūpa is in the abode of rūpa, i.e., the infinite is in the finite beings. The comparison of this *rūpa* consists of the human entity. The 'self-knowing' is entirely manifest in self-realization. So, Lālan unshrinkingly expresses:

Āmāra āpana khavara āpanāra haya nā
Ekavāra āpanāre cinale pare yāya acenāre cenā (Choudhury, 2011, p.163)

It is not easy to know the inner self. But those who can know the inner self know the unknown entity or the *divine* soul. Keeping the above message of Lālan in his mind, Rabindranath writes:

Āpanāke ei jānā āmāra phurāve nā
Ei jānārai saṅge saṅge tomāya cenā (Tagore, 1914, p. 84)

That means the journey of *knowing yourself* will never end; that journey is akin to knowing the divine. Rabindranath is touched by the man and humanity expressed in Lālan's song. Lālan sings:

Jāta vicārī vyābhicārī
Jātira gaurava vāḍi vāḍi dekhalāma ceye
Fakir Lālan vale
Jāta pele jāta poḍātāma āguna diye (Mannan, 2010, p. 91)

That is, Lālan has seen that class-caste-religious discrimination prevails in the glory of the people of society. But he wanted to address his contemporary society about the binary system that— 'if the caste got in hand, would burn it with fire'. And Tagore writes:

He cirakālera mānuṣ sakala mānuṣera mānuṣ
Paritrāṇa kara
Bhedera cihnera tilaka parā
Saṁkīrṇatāra auddhatya theke (Wahub, 2009, p. 283)

That means the universal man is in all human beings. According to Tagore, the sign of discrimination or a binary system is the beginning of human arrogance and narrow-mindedness. Lālan says in a song:

Gharera cāvi parera hāte
Kemane khuliye se-dhana dekhava cakṣete (Khan, 2007, p. 227)

This same lament has been echoed in Rabindranath's song:

Veṅge mora gharera cāvi niye yāvi ke āmāre (Tagore, 1993, p. 59)

This song can be considered a complement to Lālan's above song. Lālan says the key to redeeming the human body is in the hands of others. On the other hand, in Rabindranath's view, the one who possesses the key to redemption is a confidant. The body is a sanctuary for our accomplishments or liberation. Without knowing that the *divine* soul resides within the body, there is no possibility for accomplishment, i.e., liberation. The abode of universal man or the *divine* is in us. But sorrowness is not for knowing that the *divine is sorely* manifested in *Lālangīti* and *Rabindrasaṅgīta*. For example, Lālan says:

Āmāra e ghara khānāya virāja kare
Āmi janama bhare ekadina
Dekhalāma nāre (Khan, 2007, p. 82)

Elsewhere, he again says:

Kāchera mānuṣ ḍākacha kena śora kare
Āchisa tui yekhāne, seo sekhāne
Khũje[5] *beḍāo kāre re* (Khan, 2007, p. 162)

Alongside, Tagore says in his song:

Āmāra hiyāra mājhe lukiyechile
Dekhate āmi pāi ni
Tomāya dekhate āmi pāi ni (Tagore, 1993, PP. 26-27)

And,

Āmāra prāṇera mānuṣ āche prāṇe,
Tāi heri tāya sakalakhāne[6]

Tagore realizes the nature of his own self as unity or identity through the development of personality with its completeness and progressiveness. So, to know oneself as a process towards universal unity, becoming a universal man, i.e., *maner mānuṣ* in the philosophy as well as songs of Lālan. A man who possesses infinite potentialities can become divine and God through the realization of universal consciousness and a human through the perfect manifestation and realization in human life. In this regard, we can take into account Tagore's humanistic ideals, namely Jīvana Devatā, or 'man-divinity'. Rabindranath also thinks like Lālan:

> Human life is the highest state of salvation through unity, when all contradictions, limitations, or finiteness are merged into an infinite process which is *Brahmanvihāra* living in the finite (Tagore, 2000, pp. 39-41).

[5] Hereby, the word *khũje* means 'find out'.
[6] *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. 10, p. 209.

And,

> The development of universality or infiniteness through the development of universal humanity when man realised to the inauguration of 'universal man', in the human existence (Tagore, 2000, pp. 13-18).

Lālan's conception of the *divinity-in-man*[7] has been developed in Tagore's philosophy in his *The Religion of Man*, avoiding the formal religions with their rituals, customs, superstitions, and mythologies. Tagore thinks that the divine is to be found not in temples or mosques but in man. Rabindranath's concept of humanism is basically the service of mankind. Love for other humans is the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads man to the full realization of the divinity in man (Hossain, 2015, p. 84). Tagore says, 'For free spirit is godly, and alone can claim kinship with God' (Radhakrishnan, 1919, p. 117). According to Tagore, this 'kinship with God' is the divine union, when man becomes free from all limitations and discriminations, and thus relates himself to all men; what he observes is the realization of unity in love. Finally, Tagore thinks that man realizes all social values not in a limited sense, but through selfless service for mankind in love, for the realization of humanity or the universal man as an essential unity in man. In this way, there arises an inter-personal relationship between *I* and *thou* ('myself' and the 'other') (Hossain, 2015, pp. 84-85). And in Lālangīti, we hear:

Lālan vale,
Para valate parameśvara (Khan, 2007, p. 83)

In the above song, others are considered the divine soul. Lālan shows that there is an interpersonal relationship between me and *others*. Both Lālan and Rabindranath shared similar views on the goal of man. After all, in this context, an example: Lālan says *mānuṣ aviśvāse pāi ne re mānuṣnidhi* (Choudhury 2014: 78), i.e., those who do not believe others cannot become a man. Besides, Tagore also says *mānuṣera prati viśvāsa hārāno pāpa* (Choudhury 2014: 78), i.e., losing faith in people is a sin.

It is a summary from the above discussion that:

Lālan's philosophical perspective is more mystical and esoteric, reflecting the syncretic folk traditions. Lālan rejects traditional religion and focuses on an inner understanding of the divine, often expressed through the concept of the *maner mānuṣ* (*man* within). Lālan's philosophy emphasizes an inner journey—discovering maner mānuṣ through self-realization (an inner journey toward the divine), spiritual love, and devotion. So, his philosophy focused on man and the divine, which is present within us. We have seen that Tagore's concept of the divine is deeply rooted in the Upaniṣads and the Lālangīti, emphasizing the oneness of God and the world. He often explores the idea of the divine presence in nature and the human soul. Tagore's philosophy is characterized by an idealistic monism, where God is seen as an all-encompassing, immanent presence that pervades everything. For Tagore, the ultimate reality is an all-pervasive unity that manifests in diverse forms. He focused on the harmony between the individual soul and the universe, like Lālan's philosophical approach.

[7] This concept is in the Vedāntic view of Rāmānuj that is known as *Nara-Nārāyaṇa*. In his philosophy, the concept of *Nara-Nārāyaṇa* is understood as a manifestation of Viṣṇu, where *nara* and *nārāyaṇa* are twin sages who represent the inseparable relationship between the individual self (*nara*) and the divine (*nārāyaṇa*). Their union symbolises the path of devotion and self-realisation, where the individual soul strives to unite with the divine.

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