

Mysticism in Selected Writings of Lalon Shah and Kahlil Gibran: A Comparative Study

Bidduth Kumar Dutta

*Senior Lecturer, Department of English
Prime University, Mirpur-1, Dhaka-1216
Email: bidduthdutta@gmail.com*

Keywords:

Mysticism,
Lalon Shah,
Kahlil Gibran,
Song,
Poetry

Abstract: Mysticism is generally regarded as a spiritual discipline that incorporates a human soul to make a connection between mystical experiences and celestial reality through experience by individual experience which one feels as though one has been touched by one's higher or greater truth or power. Lalon was born in the 19th—century Indian Subcontinent who understood the terms of organized religion in his principles. He is the pioneer of the movement of democratizing society removing social disparity. His mysticism is based on the human body and mind. Similarly, Gibran was a man of 17th—century America who had gather experience of many religious reformations and shows his inner attitudes to the human body and mind, which he refers to be God's book exposing His intention to humankind. Love, religion, faith, soul, God, death etc. are the recurring issues in their poems. This study explores that both Gibran and Lalon have keen observations from their core philosophy to find out the influence of mysticism upon John Gibran and Lalon Shah through the critical analysis of their selected poetry. It would like to examine Gibran's treatment of mysticism as well as Lalon's treatment of mysticism respectively.

Lalon Shah (1774-1890) born and bred up at seuriya, Kushtia in Bangladesh, is the creator and promoter of an auspicious new genre of folk song. He was habituated to compose his songs orally. Ahmed, a Lalon research, has referred to Shree Bashanto Kumar Paul's article entitled "Fakir Lalon Shah" published in the 'Monthly Probashi', where he states that when Lalon sensed a mysterious drive in his soul to produce something. Lalon started to sing in his meditative fervent and his followers used to sing in a voice to share and memorize his enthusiasm for the overflow of his divine fringing. Among the mainstream folk songs in Bangladesh, Lalon's songs have occupied a permanent seat in the Bengali psyche for their magical melody and mystic setting. The surplus of commercialized music and contemporary market-oriented culture is being ruled by Lalon's 'metaphysical' songs in an influential way after 120 years of his death. Lalon Shah is generally adored by his devotes and is widely known to the mass people of Bangladesh as the 'BaulShamrat'. Guru Shiraj Shai, his foster father and spiritual guru, motivated him to the Baul doctrine. Abu Ishahaq Hossain (2009) says, "Lalon's imitable style to some extent fascinated Rabindranath, which was overflowed the language and thought of his great poetry like 'Balaka' and 'Mukta Chanda'." Lalon as American poet, Walt Whitman does, is questing the way how the body is supposed to be got freedom from body. He holds a different idea to all casteism, sectarianism as well as colonialism. His philosophy about life is deeply apperceived with humanism. If one can know oneself, he/she will be immersed with God (Rahman, 2003). To Lalon, all human beings are equal regards cast and creed, rich and poor. Differences among human are made by mundane consideration. It bears no value in the life hereafter or with God since death levels us all alike. Love which is a determinant of peaceful living on the earth reigns supreme. Lalon endeavored to satiate his physical love in courting with his

female counterpart. Many of his erotic and flare songs stand the testimony to his fondness of carnal love.

Similarly, Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) became known for his mystical Arabic and English works, earning fame following the publication of the prophet in 1923. He started writing at very young age and when he was at age of 10, he got to have had his first idea, a tree full of angels. All the poetry of him contains with the expression of his own experience. Kahlil Gibran gives importance to spiritual love though he does not neglect the physical reality. There are three aspects of love which he discusses in his poetry: a) Mystical b) Spiritual c) Conjugal (a combination of spiritual and physical love). His divine poetry is an experience of passionate Arabic and a staunch believer. His poetry is a true reflection of self-accountability. He believes that it is a matter of faith or the experience of emotions but it is preferable to say that what it is not to gain in our insight. Gibran's life and work are a manifestation of the reality of a strong connection between intense perception achieved through a state of expanded consciousness, and the gift of the purpose of translating this awareness into words. He seemed to have believed that there was little difference between his action and God's will and was confident in declaring himself the instrument of the divine. His perception of his creativity as spirituality inspired has prompted many to consider whether he had hallucinations or mental problems. Being a mystic, he has similarities with the classical mystics like Plato, Jesus, Rumi Bohme, Swedenborg, and the others like them but it has been always difficult to classify him. There are elements of protestant mysticism, kabbalism, Gnosticism and many other mystic orders in Gibran but he was sharp enough to make all these parts of himself. After reading, Gibran one can feel that he never fears to spread his wings in the vast and open firmament to reach the boundless, infinite and limitless spiritual world Gibran's mysticism is not far removed from spiritualism.

According to DeConick in his article, '*What is early Jews and Christian mysticism*', mysticism is sometimes professed as religious rationalism. As the fashionable scientific views, it's also related to the supposition of supernaturalism. In a very broader way, they consider it as an unlawful and dishonest reference to the divinity of a private person. The conclusion of the practice is convertible within the sagacity that the Christian and Jews mystics thinking they may be gotten heavenly knowledge to affix the group of angels in worship before the throne or be overvalued in the body. (DeConick, 2006)

Meister Eckhart describes in his book, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, that God is everywhere and everywhere is God. The believers of this concept say that everything during this world incorporates a link and this link comes from one whole. They're called pantheistic. In his views, God is that the name of unity and this unity is incredibly much seen to us in Nature. Nature is the part piece of God. (Eckhart, 2009)

Bernad McGinn in his book, *The Foundation of Mysticism*, explains that the word mysticism is closely associated with religion or we can say that it's part of any religion. All told religions, either it's in Christianity or Islam, either it's in Buddhism or Hinduism, people centre on religious practice. The core aim of the mystic isn't to chop far away from life. Life may be a part of a community and that we cannot deny this statement. Mysticism is an attempt to explain a right away link with God or it's better to sit that its immediate awareness of the existence of God (McGinn, 1992).

The mysticism of Lalon's songs has not yet been completely investigated because his songs mostly passed down from his disciple to disciple orally and were mostly unwritten. In this sense his disciple could compose only a very little number of his songs. Many of Lalon's songs have lost their originality while many fake songs are leveled with the name of Lalon. Yet the preserved songs provide the 21st-century people with considerable scope to gather knowledge regarding his treatment of mysticism. Lalon tries to know the absolute with unsounded devotion in the heart escaping the mode of knowledge because he always trusts that the more is the knowledge, the more is the mysteriousness:

*God is in the form of own Self
He will be reached if the mind is devoted.
More you read the Vedas, more you will get confused*

Lalon researcher, Haroonuzzaman, writes in his book, *Lalon*, Lalon's songs bear the traits of mysticism. Lalon may be a mystic poet and his lyrics are mystic songs within the sense that Lalon and his followers hold the view that God is hidden within the human heart and neither priest nor prophet, nor the ritual of any organized religion, will help man to search out Him there. They believe that God within them is the same God within all people at large. There's no beauty truer than God. Their songs are of joy, love, and their deep probing for mystical union with the divine. Through their simple, meaningful songs which contain philosophy and aspirations to be merged with the spiritual being, they seek to appease, share and provoke thought. (Haroonuzzaman, 2008)

Again he says, according to Lalon, God is mysterious and it's very difficult to understand him whether the curious question like "Who am I?", "Who talks in me?" and "Who is that everyone powerful?" covered his mind. So, his quest continues while he knows they live so near one another. They're so closer yet they're up to now. Like great metaphysical poets, comparing the human soul to a mirror city where God dwells in,

Lalon says:

*Not one day I could see him
So near is Arshinagar
There lives a neighbor*

To Lalon, if one will be merged with God, no sorrows will touch him during this life and therefore the life hereafter Lalon continues his hunt for God as he wants to be united together with his illusory neighbour. The unstructured, spiritual lord be present to His creation with the continuous images like Karim, Ram, Kala, Rahim, etc. ----- "Who knows what's he like?" (Haroonuzzaman, 2008)

Another Prominent Lalon Researcher, M Shaheen in his book, *A Collection of Literary Essays: Bengali Baul Fakir Lalon Shah's Invention of Tradition*, says that like the American poet Lalon celebrates the liberty of the body and therefore the soul. He was hostile all casteism, sectarianism and colonialism. His lifelong philosophy was profoundly absorbed in humanism. Like Socrates Lalon also believes the foremost important thing in one's life is to 'Know Thyself'. If one can know his self, he/she are immersed with God. (Rahman, 2003) To Lalon, knowledge and truth, the most important treasure of human life, are not divine things rather the human Guru/Master is the source of them. That is why he rejects all scriptural truth. Lalon longs for knowledge, which passes down secretly from heart to heart of the Guru/Master and justified by the teacher. Baul religion is the religion of guruism. The Guru acts an important role to perfect the religious exercises of the adept. Without the grace of the guru, any ascetic practise is futile. The Bauls do believe that God is within every human being, but he is more fully manifest in the guru who has attained liberation and is a perfect figure. He is anintercessor between human and creator.

That is why Lalon says: —

*He, who is devoted to the human guru in the world,
Succeeds in all his meditations.*

The success of all efforts of the devotee relies upon the wish of the Lord who controls everything, even the mind of the adept. Since the Master is omniscient and omnipotent nothing is beyond his knowledge:

*Who knows the information without God?
That alteration is not externally, rather it is mysterious.
People say that the Lord possesses nectar;
Falling that feet and you will have that nectar.*

Lalon does believe that salvation in the world beneath will not be believed without the recommendation of the Master:

*Be sure the existence of your Lord and His gem,
You will be unable to know the life passes away.
God is the total of my wealth.
God is the tip of all my pros.
I rely on His feet for my crucial freedom.*

According to Lalon, the Lord reveals before the devotee whenever he calls Him with perfect devotion. But Lalon warns human who equates the Lord with the common men, will be befallen. There are three parts, to Lalon's observation, of the reality of the master of supremacy. One is the consumer in the form of the male, the other is the consumed in the form of the female and the third is the combination of the previous two, the highest state of pleasurable thrill. Understanding the state thirdly is the ultimate goal of their practice:

*He is Krisna in His-self
In the other-self, Queen Radha,
In the self-owner, the essence of love,
And then, is produced the apex pleasure.*

Another important element of Lalon's mysticism is knowledge about the ultimate truth. Lalon is eager to know the identity of the ultimate or the Absolute whose beauty has flooded the world. But he does not know where this beauty does dwell on the earth. It is not possible to know whether it has any form or is just a luminous spirit. He is curious to know what shape it was assumed at the time of creation and where the world was created. Lalon says that one needs to search God in the forest rather He is found to be one's, own soul. Lalon also says that man has come in this world with a mission. He has to perform some duties assigned on him by God, but he is careless about his duties and consequently, he will, one day, be caught re handled by God. To Lalon, God's role is shrouded in mystery. It is beyond the grasp of ordinary people to realize God's motivations. He discloses the mystery:

*Creator is radiant like the moon but cannot be seen.
He is formless.
The world was originated through Ahmed
In the bosom of Adam
Someone dwells in the form of life
And Death is repulsed.*

Lalon's deep faith in God who has created human creature for showing His rare sympathy If man misuses this golden chance, he must repent in the long run and there will be no remedy for it. He reminds us that service, worship, devotion, and remembrance are the proper activities of man; only animals live by bread alone. Lalon is anxious about his transitory existence in this

world. He does not know where he had been before his birth and where he will go after his death. He is afraid that nobody will accompany him to the grave. He failed to recognize his Lord because of his evil company and love for worldly affairs. He repents of his ignorance of the consequence of his evil deeds. The transient nature of worldly life makes Lalon agitated:

Oh, my mind! What is the source of your pride?

Don't you know the gameplay-

Will not last long?

Lalon repents that he has forgotten the promise he made before coming in this world. This is because he has been enamoured of the material world. He says that without perfection in self-knowledge no strife in meditation becomes fruitful. He reminds the devotees:

If you don't possess self-knowledge,

you won't have meditation

Rather you would fall into doubt.

Lalon emphasizes on the mystery of the self since its identity is not certain. He is not certain: —Who is yours in this world and whom do you belong to? [Translation by Alam] He realizes that foolish deeds took place because he had not recognized himself. Lalon recognizes that man's existence in this world is an utter failure, because the object of his arrival remained unfulfilled. His mind got imprisoned by the sinful surroundings as a result of which his whole life has become a chronicle of mental agony. He is unfortunate enough not to receive God's mercy. Lalon's mind is tortured with the universal questions regarding its current state, its ultimate destination and its companions. It is simply an illusion to take the present abode to be permanent. The present dwelling is easily breakable. The ignorant mind of Lalon leads him astray. He has become the victim of the riddle of existence. His panic-stroked mind expresses its utter hopelessness:

My mind never bothered to know

Where it to live, where it to go, and whom attached with.

Lalon does believe that God is one and there is an undivided wholesome in humankind. So there should have been one religion and that should be the religion of human. When he finds so many paths and opinions among men, he is greatly shocked because these multiplicities in religion are created by men for their interest. In God's creation, there is no difference between man and man. —Lalon does not recognize the cast-system. He declares himself to be a member of mankind. This is the philosophy of his universal humanism (Ahmed, 2002).

On the other hand, Gibran's life and work are a manifestation of the reality of a strong connection between intense perception achieved through a state of expanded consciousness, and the gift of the purpose of translating this awareness into words. Gibran seems to have believed that there was little difference between his action and God's will. Gibran was confident in declaring himself the instrument of the divine. His perception of his creativity as spirituality inspired has prompted many to consider whether or not he had hallucinations or mental problems. Some even considered him mad. One can include Gibran in the tradition of the hallowed poet because his work is essentially part of the western biblical pedigree. Gibran was a mystic and has similarities with the classical mystics like Plato, Jesus, Rumi Bohme, Swedenborg and the others like them but it has been always difficult to classify him. There are elements of protestant mysticism, Gnosticism and many other mystic orders in Gibran but he was sharp enough to make all these part of himself.

F. E. Spurgeon says: “he possessed, in addition, a philosophy, a system and a profound scheme of the universe revealed to him in vision. But within the category could Gibran be imprisoned? He outsoars them all and includes them all. Gibran is not a mystic proper; there are moments when he seems to be a mystic of a higher order who appears to be under the guidance of Jesus, Socrates and Gautama Buddha. After reading Gibran one can feel that he never fears to spread his wings in the vast and open firmament to reach the boundless, infinite and limitless spiritual world Gibran’s mysticism is not far removed from spiritualism. He is more of a prophet and a visionary.” (Spurgeon, 2004) Gibran that “Man does not know how to strip himself down to his bare essence. He has to outdo himself, to forge ahead with an ardent desire (the shawl of the Sufis) towards his divine self, and to aspire to universal unity where everything reintegrates in a unique and total hymn: the unity which is none other than God similarly, the after having travelled the path leading to God, would merge with him.” (Gibran, 1923) In the poem “Have Mercy On Me, My Souk!” Gibran deliberates on the metaphysics of duality related to body and soul. One should try to respect and reach the demand of both souls as well as body. In other words, both body and soul should be given their rightful importance.

You are hastening toward Eternity.

But this Body goes slowly toward

Perishment. You do not wait for him,

And he cannot go quickly.

This, my soul, is sadness (Gibran, The Greatest Works Of Kahlil Gibran, 2010)

“Songs of Wave” is a poem written in an Eastern mystical tradition. The beloved craves for her lover. She at times desires a union with him. Here, the symbol of ‘wave’ has been used for the eternal lover and the image of ‘shore’ for the beloved.

The strong shore is my beloved

And I am his sweetheart.

We are at last united by love, and

Then the moon draws me from him.

I go to him in haste and depart

Reluctantly, with many

Little farewells. (Gibran, The Greatest Works Of Kahlil Gibran, 2010)

There is no rest for true lovers. This love can be found between God or gods and a devotee or between two human beings. “Song of the Man” is a poem where a man sings of his history. He is in this world from the beginning, yet he is imperfect. According to him, the only perfection is in the complete union with the divine.”

I was here from the moment of the

Beginning, and here I am still. And

I shall remain here until the end

Of the world, for there is no

Ending to my grief-stricken being. (Gibran, The Greatest Works Of Kahlil Gibran, 2010)

In “A Poet’s Voice” Gibran says that love for material things deadens a man and spiritual strivings keep him alive. The poet is a mystic and believes that humanity is the spirit of a great being. The poet sees himself one with all humanity.

I come here to be for all and with all,

And what I do present in my solitude mind

Be echoed by tomorrow to the people.

What I tell at present with one heart will be

Saying tomorrow by many hearts. (Gibran, The Greatest Works Of Kahlil Gibran, 2010)

For the poet, all are unity and all religions are one because we are part of the greater soul. The poet hates authority of every sort because only God can do absolute justice. He believes that life emerges from the soul and not from the body. Gibran's mysticism is rooted in the ideal of love seeking a union with divine reality. Thoughts and Meditations are also full of mystical insight. In "My Soul Preached to Me" Gibran states about the power of love that encompasses all the objects related to the nature. Here Gibran has a mystic realization that all places and all men are one reality. In "Among the Ruins" Gibran says that love and eternity are the same things. Nothing remains except love. The material objects decline and are abolished for the time being.

Gibran says:

"I created a temple in Jerusalem and the priests sanctified it, but time has destroyed it. But in my heart, the altar I built for love was consecrated by God and sustained against the powers of destruction." (Gibran K., 1988)

He further writes:

Eternity keeps nought but love, for love is like Eternity. (Gibran K., 1988)

"Perfection" is a prose poem in which Gibran expresses his mystic fervour. According to him, a man approaches perfection when he truly realizes that he is boundless, infinite and everlasting and also realizes that he is a human being with all his shortcomings and frailties. All this helps him to become a shadow of God's shadow.

Both Gibran and Lalou became gorgeous from the spiritual point of view. They became the guides of innumerable pathless men. Both became spiritually mature enough to theorize the principles and to predict the ultimate outputs of theories. To many, they were claimed by their devotees to be God's select to convey the message of God to humankind. Each work of Gibran and Lalou can be read and interpreted in the light of mystic thought. Both these writers were selfless and they aimed to serve the higher powers through their works.

To sum up the whole study, we may have a conclusion that both writers believe the oneness of God and have a strong belief in God. Mysticism is comparable to the bouquet of a flower. Although we can see the flower, we cannot see the fragrance of the flower; we can feel its presence in nature or our surrounding. Though, if we cannot see God but we can get the Ultimate reality and Divinity Knowledge. Both of them have inner faith and philosophy upon religious issues and mystic literature. They have similar attitudes toward life, poetic career, and mystic vision. Both had to lead miserable and traumatic experiences in their family and society for which they have enabled to show faith, attitudes, principles, and social images in their poetic career. Gibran championed the metaphysical school of poetry whereas Shah is the Emperor of Bengali folk songs which were composed orally in his lifetime. The prophetic message of Lalou and Gibran continues to inspire millions of readers who love to recite or listen to their poetry. Let me conclude this discussion saying Love, religion, faith, soul, God, death, and mystic vision are the recurrent themes in their writings. Both Lalou's and Gibran's mystic writings carry the symbol of Literary genres presently around the world.

Works Cited

- [1]. Ahmed, W. *Lalon Geeti Samagra*. Dhaka: Boi Patra Prokashoni, 2002.
- [2]. DeConick, A D. *What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?." Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism, Symposium Series 11*. Society of Biblical Literature, 2006. 10 February 2021. <<https://hdl.handle.net/1911/72211>>.
- [3]. EcKhart, M. *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* . New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009.
- [4]. Gibran, Kahlil . *The Prophet* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923.
- [5]. Gibran, Kahlil. *The Greatest Works Of Kahlil Gibran*. New York: Jaico Books -educabooks , 2010.
- [6]. Haroonuzzaman. *Lalon*. Dhaka: Adorn Publication, 2008.
- [7]. Houssain, Abu Istiak. *Lalon Shah: The Great Poet*. Dhaka: Palal Prokashoni, 2009.
- [8]. McGinn, B. *The Foundation of Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992.
- [9]. Rahman, M Shahinoor. *A Collection of Literary Essays: Bengali Baul Fakir Lalon Shah's Invention of Tradition*. Dhaka: Writer's Foundation, 2003.
- [10]. Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. *Mysticism in English Literature; The Project Gutenberg E Book of Mysticism in English Literature*. 7 April 2004. 16 February 2021. <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/11935/11935-h/11935-h.htm>>.