





Parvathy Baul

Renowned Baul singer shares her music with SUFI

From an interview by MARTIN HARRIS

The *Baul* say that we are searching, and this path of searching is itself the aim of the search. Music is ever existent in all the creation, in life and in death. As we say, when the universe was created there was only the sound OM. The *ektara* (one string instrument) is held mostly by the right hand of the Baul singer and held very close to the right ear, which gives the singer a constant Om sound. On this base the Baul voice travels. Music opens the heart; music can be a vehicle to transcend, to transform, and to bring a direct experience of inner happening here and now. A Baul would say that I sing and dance to impress my beloved so my beloved will come and reside in my heart. My master once told me, "A song is nothing but dance of breath." For a Baul, music is the straight way to connect to the divine.

I was 16 when I was first exposed to the Baul *Parampara*. I was on my way in a train with my brother towards Shantiniketan to take admission as a student. Somewhere in the middle of the journey a Baul singer came into the compartment. He could not see, he had an *ektara* made of tin. His long fingers with long nails struck the string of *ektara*, and the sound immediately transported me to another space of reality. When he started singing, all the people in the train compartment disappeared from my sight.

Later, when I saw Guru Shri Sanatan Das Baul of Bankura performing, I was amazed to see how he danced and sang and played his *ektara* and *bama* and *nupur*. I had heard singers before, but Baul's voice came from the bottom of the heart, from the body. It was a voice opened to the sky.

I have never experienced anything so complete before. In my search to become an artist I was looking for this completeness. I went in search of my Guru, Sanatan Das Baul of Bankura. My search led me to his ashram in Khayerbani, in an afternoon in the spring time. He was tall, dark, standing with a straight spine, his hair gathered carefully into a topknot. He was drying his cloth and looked at me with much compassion. As a young student I had a thousand things to explain. He smiled and asked me if I had my lunch. He promised to talk to me later.

I spent 15 days beside him, on the same small porch. He did not even ask my name. On the 15th day he called me to come for a walk with him to the market. On the way to the market he started singing; he looked at me and said to me, "Stupid girl, why don't you follow me?" I started singing with him, and this was the start of long lessons I have been receiving for almost 20 years now.

As once stated by Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the truth and hardship of yoga are difficult for the modern human to achieve, for their minds and bodies are fast-moving and weak. But if they utter the name of the beloved with pure devotion they can experience the same without effort. Singing and dancing in divine love helps one to break free from all the daily life inhibitions, and all our emotions become directed towards the beloved.

Many times it happened in many people's lives that they were not aware, but happened to hear a song of Baul, and it touched them so deeply that it changed everything for them. Like the way I was touched and was wounded by the Baul song in that train to Shantiniketan. There is a beautiful Baul song asking:

*Crazy! Crazy! Everyone says I am crazy!
But often I wonder is it the world or me?*

Or the song often rendered by great Bauls of Bengal:

*Oh mother! Make me mad
I have nothing to do anymore with judgments or knowledge,
The crazy ones gather in heaven, Jesus, Moses and Chaitanya,
They are drunk with divine love
Mother when will I join them, singing and dancing in divine madness?*

Read the full interview at www.sufijournal.org