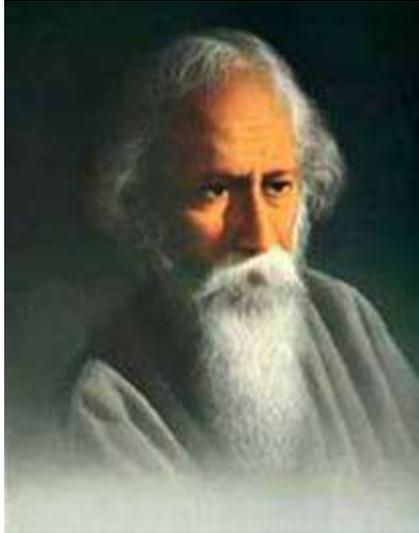


Cultural Heritage of Bengal

Rabindra Sangeet:



Songs written by Rabindranath Tagore is known as Rabindra sangeet. Born at Jorasanko (Kolkata) on 9th may 1861, he wrote about 2230 songs mainly on love and nature. The collection of songs is known as *Gitbitan* (garden of songs).

The Rabindra Sangeet is regarded as the cultural treasure of Bengal and Bangladesh. Today we cannot think Bengali culture without Rabindra Sangeet. These songs are the foundation of the Bengali ethos that is comparable to, perhaps even greater than that which Shakespeare has on the English speaking world. It is said that his songs are the outcome 500 years of literary and cultural churning that the Bengali community has gone through. His songs have transcended the mundane to the aesthetic and express all ranges and categories of human emotions. The post had given a voice to all big or small, rich or poor - every man of our society finds expression for his or her emotional trials and tribulations in Tagore's songs. That is why Gandhijee said him 'Gurudev'.

Nazrul Geeti:

The sangeet written by Kazi Nazrul, who was one of the famous Bengali Poets whose poetic works and music expressed strong protest against the British rule in Bengal, is known as Nazrul Geeti or Nazrul Sangeet. He is officially recognized as the national poet of Bangladesh. He was born on the 25th may 1898 at Churulia, in the District of Bardwan, West Bengal. He is popularly known as Bidrohi Kobi (rebel poet). Nazrul Sangeet incorporates revolutionary notation as well as more spiritual, philosophical and romantic themes. Nazrul Geeti had strong effects on Bengali culture in India as well as Bangladesh. . He gave voice to the revolutionary as well as common people to fight against slavery, communalism, feudalism and all the cruelism of British Raj in India. Some of his famous poems include Sanchita, Chakrabak, Satbhai Champa, Nirjhar, Agni Bina, and Novels like Bandhan Hara, Kuhelika.



Baul:

Bauls are a group of mystic minstrels and a part of the culture of rural Bengal which constitute both a syncretic religious sect and a musical tradition. The word **Baul** has its etymological origin in the Sanskrit words *Vatula* (madcap) and used for someone who is **possessed** or **crazy**. Bauls are an extension of the Sahajiya philosophy. Baul thought has mixed elements of Tantra, Sufi Islam, Vaishnavism and Buddhism read in Bengali texts as old as the 15th century.

Bauls are also found in the eastern parts of Bihar and Jharkhand and Bangladesh. The Baul movement was at its peak in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but even today one comes across the occasional Baul with his *Ektara* (one-stringed musical instrument) and begging bowl, singing across the far-flung villages of rural Bengal. The Bauls were recorded as a major sect as early as mid 18th century. There are two classes of Bauls: ascetic Bauls who Bauls renounce family life and society and survive on alms and Bauls who live with their families.

The music of the Bauls, *Baul Sangeet*, is a particular type of folk song. It carries influences of Hindu bhakti movements as well as the *suphi*, a form of Sufi song exemplified by the songs of Kabir. Their music represents a long heritage of preaching mysticism through songs in Bengal like Shahebdhoni or Bolahadi sects.



Durga Puja:



Durga Puja is the biggest festival in Bengal. This is also known as *Dussehra* and *Navaratri* in other parts of India. *Durga* is the Goddess of divine power against all evils. The story goes that *Mahisasur*, the Buffalo Demon, through years of praying, received blessing from *Lord Brahma*, that no power could kill him which meant he was invincible. But once gaining this power he started ravaging the whole world and killing people. And finally he wanted to uproot the Gods too. The Gods, in dismay, combined their powers to create a beautiful maiden, and each placed his or her most potent weapon in one of her ten hands riding a lion. Her return in each year in the Bengali month of *Aswin* (September-October) commemorates Rama's invocation of the goddess *Durga* before he went into battle

with. The tableau of *Durga* with her four children - *Kartik*, *Ganesh*, *Saraswati* and *Lakshmi*, representing respectively the Protector, the Initiator of the puja, Knowledge and the Provider - signifies the complete manifestation of the goddess.

Festival preparations include the construction of images beginning a month or two in advance. **Pandals** (a covered huge stage) and idols inspired by a particular theme have been the hallmark of many community or Sarbajanin Pujas. Kumartuli, a place in north Calcutta, is famous as a place for expert artisans who use clay modeling to build the images of *Durga*, *Mahisasur*, *Kartick*, *Ganesh*,





Saraswati and Lakshmi. This is a wonderful form of art and part of a deep rooted culture. Another group of people starts building a pandal with paper, wood, bamboos, clothes and other materials. They come up with beautiful structures, most of the times they are so beautiful and real that, it is tough to believe that these are made for only couple of days or a week. Some constructions are built as replica of world famous structures.

The inauguration starts on Mahashasthi. The main puja is for three days - Mahasaptami, Mahaastami, Mahanavami. After the three days of Puja, on *Dashami*, the last day, a tearful farewell is offered to the Goddess. Most of the community pujas postpone the farewell as long as possible and arrange a grand send-off. The images are carried in processions around the locality and finally are immersed in a nearby river or lake. To put in simple words, the Durga Puja, the greatest show of Bengal has been preserved honourably.

