

CAPWELL, CHARLES. *The Music of the Bauls of Bengal*. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1986. X+244 pages. Maps, photos, tables, musical illustrations, appendices, references, index. Hardcover US\$32.00, ISBN 0-87338-317-6.

This book is an excellent attempt in the English language to study the music of the Bauls of Bengal. Charles Capwell, however, is not the first person to have worked on Baul music as a western musicologist. Before him, Professor Kuckertz also studied the music in West Bengal (Kuckertz 1975). Capwell spent two and one half years in West Bengal studying the Baul sect as part of his doctoral research at Harvard. Both Kuckertz and Capwell, however, did not visit Bangladesh (former East Bengal).

The present volume attempts to provide a broad survey of the musical tradition of the Bauls of Bengal with respect to their historical, social and cultural background as well as an approach to their musical practice and style. But certainly the work is mistitled as it takes into account the Bauls of West Bengal only and leaves out Bangladesh (former East Bengal). By way of apology, Charles Capwell said, "While research for this book was done exclusively in West Bengal, the study includes interviews and recordings of East Bengal Bauls, who like millions of other Hindu-Bengalis, had become refugees from East Bengal after the partition" (5). He however admitted that these Bauls who once lived in East Bengal, now Bangladesh, had acquired a veneer of Vaisnavism after they migrated (5). In West Bengal he interviewed those who were, in fact, Vaiṣṇava by faith. Most of the Hindu scholars are of the opinion that Bauls are either Vaiṣṇava or an offshoot of the Vaiṣṇava sect (22). But Bauls include both Hindu and Muslim and they claim that their religion is humanistic. And surprisingly, Capwell, during his stay in West Bengal, did not interview any Muslim Baul. He also failed to visit Kushtia, a district of Bangladesh and bordering Nadia of West Bengal, for the study of the Bauls since Kushtia is the home of the Bauls of Bangladesh. Lalon Faquir (Shah) (10) the spiritual leader of the Bauls lived and died in Kushtia. There is an Akhra, a religious retreat in Kushtia where hundreds of Bauls throng every year on the full moon night of the Bengali month Falgun (March). Rabindranath Tagore is believed to have met him while he was in Kushtia and was influenced by him to adopt Baul thought, diction and music in his works (25). In West Bengal the Bauls have the Vaiṣṇava title *Das*, and in Bangladesh they have the Sufi title *Shah*. However they belong to an obscure religious sect. They are the product of the cross current of several forces—Tantric or Sahajiya Buddhism, Vaiṣṇava Sahajiya and Indo-Persian Sufism. This sect is termed obscure because of their erotic and sexo-yoga practice. The songs of the Bauls present riddles and it requires a special kind of knowledge to solve them. Capwell possibly misinterpreted and misunderstood the term obscurity to mean 'not much known' (preface).

There has been much disagreement over the meaning of the term 'baul'. Capwell, quoting western scholars like Dimock and Levertov, suggested that etymologically the word is derived from Sanskrit *vatula* 'windy', affected by the wind disease, 'mad', or *vyakula* 'restless', 'disordered'. The Bauls belong to a religious sect which either faked or made a false imitation of the Sufi Auliyas (friend to Allah). The Bauls are not mad or windy. Their *sadhana* or religious practice is concerned with the holding of breath (wind) as a part of sexo-yoga practice. The control of breath is considered most important during sex play because the Bauls are not permitted to discharge semen into the female genital organ except on permission from their Guru. Oriental scholars agree that a Muslim Sufi is the innovator of this cult. Hence the word Baul is derived from Arabic Auliya. Auliya>Aul>Baul or Auliya>Bauliya>

Baul (folk etymology).

The 242 pages of text are divided into ten chapters, with a preface and an introduction. Ch. I deals with such matters as the definition of the name Baul and who it applies to, their beliefs and practices, their dress and musical instruments, and their attitude to life.

Ch. II discusses the evolution of the Bauls as cultural emblem (identity). It also includes a discussion on the Bauls as viewed by the Bengali scholars including Rabindranath Tagore and Kshitimohon Sen.

Ch. III suggests the place of the Baul song in the folk and traditional songs of Bengal, and gives a classification of Baul song in the context of Bengali musical classification terms. Ch. IV includes background of some singers as personally observed by the author.

Ch. V includes discussion on Baul performance at certain *mela* or fairs which occur annually or at the mausoleum of an old Faquir.

Ch. VI classifies texts and subject matter of the Baul song. Ch. VII describes different classes of instruments which are used by the Bauls and non-Bauls to accompany a Baul song. The author discusses six musical instruments: Gopiyatra, khamak and dotara (chordophones); ghungur, nupur (idiophones); and dugi (membranophone).

Ch. VIII and IX take up musical organization which focuses on the rhythmic features of Baul music and principles governing the selection and use of pitches.

In Ch. X the author discusses the structure of the Baul song, texts and their musical setting, and also examines with illustrations how the hypothesized structure relates to the actual rendition of a Baul song. The text is followed by an appendix which includes thirty-four original Bengali song texts with English translation and notes, a bibliography and an index. A number of good photographs are scattered throughout the book—the majority illustrating music practice and instruments.

This book does adhere to the basic tenets of ethno-musicological research, namely, background material which is drawn largely from field work in West Bengal as well as from works already published. The purpose of the book is an ethnomusicological examination of Baul music in order to determine their origin and relationship to culture, and also to isolate the musical features of the song.

This is a book intended for the scholar as well as the general reader. Its approach is functional rather than abstract. The intention is to present Baul songs in such a way that they may be understood and used by the foreign scholars. This book presents an interesting discussion of Baul music, its structure and performance practice. The notes of the songs are among the most valuable aspects of the book. As the book is written for general readers as well as scholars in the field, a glossary of important terms would indeed have been welcome. He has, however, given assistance by using a transliteration and pronunciation guide.

In terms of format and organization the book is well thought out, well designed, and attractive. The author has made anecdotal biographies of the Baul singers and their involvement and understanding of the Baul songs. The varied topics represent several types of methodology, observation of the Baul life, and Baul performance context; interviewing, participant observation as an active listener, and published sources.

Capwell lucidly describes the singing style of the Bauls. But he possibly forgot to mention that there are actually two types of singing style—wandering and non wandering. The non wandering style is Akhra based. This style is deeply devotional and soft. The melody is gentle, calm and sonorous. The wandering style is hoarse,

vigorous, high pitched and strong. It is occasionally quick, flexible, and metrical.

It may be pointed out here that no one knows what were the actual tonal forms of the Baul songs at their origin, since no records are available. Although the Bauls do not believe in ceremonies, manners, and customs, and enjoy freedom in their social and religious approach, in practice they have developed certain rituals concerning their relationship with Guru and Sadhana. One must understand that the Bauls are not primarily a singing group and are not a form of gypsies. The melody of the Baul song is always very simple and in the composition it does not conform to the rules set by a classical school or established pattern. Many Baul songs exhibit only a simple "rise and fall of the tune." The Baul songs of West Bengal are of different type so far as the texts and tunes are concerned. The Bauls of West Bengal are indebted to the *Kirtana* of the vaiṣṇava. In Bangladesh the text and tune are to a great extent Sufi based.

Capwell does not elaborately discuss the effect of modernization on Baul culture as well as music. He also does not show how the Baul singing style has changed or is changing due to the effect of modernization, viz., through radio and television. In conclusion I can say that the book is indeed a valuable work about the recent past, a fine study of the Baul music of West Bengal, India.

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EDGERTON, FRANKLIN. *The Elephant-Lore of the Hindus. The Elephant-Sport (Mataṅga-Lilā) of Nilakantha*. Translated from the original Sanskrit. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985 (reprint of the 1931 edition). Xix+129 pages. Glossary, index. Rs 50.—, ISBN 81-208-0005-2.

Indian kings made prominent use of elephants from very early times, partly for ceremonial display, partly as one of the four recognized divisions of the army. Because of this elephantology was considered to be part of *Arthaśāstra*—the science of statecraft or government. It is natural that the elephant also played a prominent role in Sanskrit literature. *Mataṅga-Lilā* (Elephant-Sport) of Nilakantha is the best available Sanskrit work on Elephantology. The book *The Elephant-Lore of the Hindus* by F. Edgerton gives a complete translation of *Mataṅga-lilā* into English along with detailed explanatory notes, a glossary, and a general introduction to the whole topic.

To what extent does this ancient elephant-science represent actual experience with elephants, rather than mere theoretical or fanciful speculation? Edgerton is of the opinion that *Mataṅga-lilā* is an outcome of a genuine, ancient, and persistent tradition of elephant-lore, which grew up in and around the elephant stables of India potentates.

In its twelve chapters, the *Mataṅga-lilā* gives a lot of detailed information on various aspects of elephants such as the different 'castes,' physical peculiarities, favourable and unfavourable marks and the sounds. It also warns against capturing a female